

The Development of Modern African Politics and the  
Emergence of a Nationalist Movement in Colonial  
Malawi, 1891-1958.

by

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## SUMMARY

The various conflicts of the nineteenth century and the imposition of British rule permanently weakened the traditional political systems and institutions thus rendering them incapable of dealing with the new challenges of colonialism. The chiefs also came to be used by the British as intermediaries to establish and maintain contact between the colonial power and the African populace. Because their administrative duties were light, so the chiefs remained in close relationship with the people. But they were becoming government agents and mission-educated Africans - the new elite - began forming Native Associations from 1912 to represent more effectively the feelings and aspirations of the African people to the colonial government.

Meanwhile, some other educated Africans were pursuing political activity through independent African churches. These African church leaders protested against the abuses, frustrations and injustices that many Africans were being made to suffer as a result of settler, missionary and colonial enterprises. One of these church movements, led by the Rev. John Chilembwe, attempted forcibly to drive out many of the hated white men from Nyasaland in 1915, but the rising was put down. Chilembwe sought to set up a new African state which would be wider than the narrow tribal base but his movement failed to attract widespread African support.

Upto the 1930s, there were no important economic



and social changes to undercut the relationship between chiefs and the mass of the people, both of whom remained closely attached to the tribal ways of life. Chiefs also continued to be the favoured agents of the government and the new educated elements were unable to gain admission to the official exercise of power in local affairs. Nor were the Native Associations successful either in commanding mass African support or in obtaining any significant political and social reforms from the colonial government.

From the early 1930s, the central government began to take greater action in all fields of economic and social development. The mass of the African people were gradually brought into individual contact with the machinery and personnel of the central government. The people found that the chiefs were unable to provide any solutions to their new problems. Educated Africans now began seeking direct African representation on the Legislative Council and all other boards directly affecting the lives of the African population. They also moved towards the creation of a national-wide political organization and founded the Nyasaland African Congress in 1944.

In the post-1945 period, the central government greatly expanded the scope of its operations. By having to enforce a number of unpopular measures such as the regulations governing soil erosion, the chiefs were further discredited as the mere agents of the colonial government. The government's land and agrarian policies,

combined with the imposition of the hated Central African Federation in 1953, led to large-scale disaffection among the rural masses and considerable bitterness among African intellectuals. The Nyasaland African Congress provided the framework for the coming together of the educated elite and the masses. During the mid-1950s, a petty rural bourgeoisie came to serve as the spokesman for the agitated masses (thus replacing the discredited chiefs) and recruited large numbers of Africans into the Congress movement. Greater initiatives towards mass organization also developed from the central Congress headquarters which was now committing itself to the idea of an independent African state based on majority rule. In leadership, membership and ideology, the Nyasaland African Congress, by 1959, had achieved the status of a full-scale nationalist movement.



## PREFACE

The literature relating to the study of African politics in colonial Malawi is very small. What exists, however, is generally of very high quality and I have benefitted immensely from it, particularly from the writings of Professors G.A. Shepperson and J. van Velsen and Dr. K.J. McCracken. Nevertheless, of all the countries of East and Central Africa, Malawi possesses the least documented record of its colonial past. Numerous topics of a political nature, which have been the subject of considerable research in neighbouring countries in recent years, still require to be investigated for Malawi. It was my desire, from 1966, to do research on some of these topics and thus attempt to contribute to the few existing studies on Malawi politics. I hoped that an examination of materials in the Malawi National Archives would substantially assist my work. This institution contains indispensable primary and secondary information on Malawi's colonial past. The sudden closure of the archives in February 1967, however, not only curtailed my access to the most important source of documentation on Malawi but appeared also to signal the end of my whole research project. Fortunately, I had been able to consult a number of important files on African political activity before the Government of Malawi closed the archives down. But even after supplementing this material by research in various British institutions, a number of gaps still presented themselves in my work.

A study of African politics in colonial Malawi, it seems to me, can only be carried out thoroughly by consulting people and documentation in Malawi itself. It was only through gaining access to a number of private holdings of papers in Malawi and through conducting interviews with many Malawians that I was able to give my work a more coherent and systematic shape. Without the full co-operation of many Malawians my work could not have gone forward.

To mention names would be invidious: but by naming my informants in the text, I have provided some indication of my great indebtedness. I would, however, like to single out for special thanks the Rev. C.C. Chinula and J.C. Malifa who not only provided me with their private papers but were also generous with their time and personally hospitable as well on many occasions. Without the very great assistance of my students at the University of Malawi, who participated with me in my work and who provided me with their companionship as well as introducing me to African life, this study could never have been completed. To all of these Malawians, I will always be greatly indebted.

I am also very grateful to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi, Dr. I. Michael, for his unfailing assistance and encouragement. I am more than grateful to the University of Malawi for research grants which enabled me to travel throughout Malawi with my students on a number of occasions.

I would also like to thank G.D. Hazeldine of the



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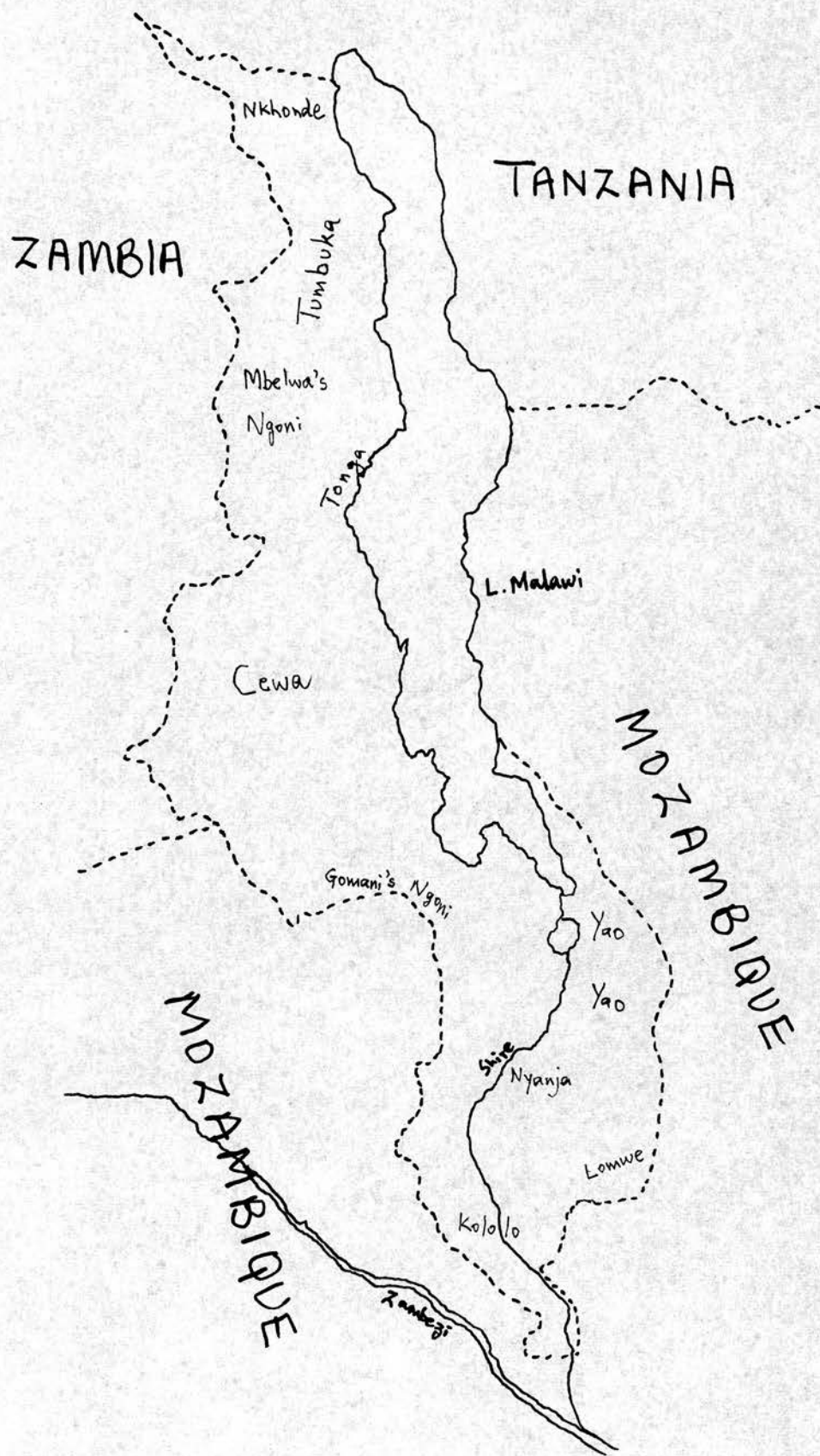
I am deeply indebted to Professor G.A. Shepperson of the University of Edinburgh, both for the example of his own work and for his valuable advice and consistent encouragement. C.D. Raab, also of Edinburgh University, gave helpful advice on the preparation of the thesis. My thanks are also due to my colleagues at Chancellor College, University of Malawi - especially I. Linden, Dr. B. Pachai, H.L. Vail and N. Wincott. I have been assisted in a variety of ways by Dr. R.J. Macdonald of Syracuse University, Dr. K.J. McCracken of Stirling University, Rev. Dr. J.M. Schoffeleers of the Catechetical Training Centre Likulezi, and Professor J. van Velsen of the University of Zambia.

My wife, Gudrun, did the typing and retyping of copy and her devoted assistance has been invaluable throughout.

## Abbreviations

Cmd.	Command Paper (1919-1948)
Cmnd.	Command Paper (1949-1964)
C.O.	Colonial Office
C.S.	Chief Secretary
A.C.S.	Acting Chief Secretary
D.C.	District Commissioner
F.C.O.	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
F.O.	Foreign Office
M.N.A.	Malawi National Archives
P.C.	Provincial Commissioner
A.P.C.	Acting Provincial Commissioner
P.C.N.P.	Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province
P.C.S.P.	Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province
P.R.O.	Public Record Office
S.P.C.	Senior Provincial Commissioner









## CONTENTS

Preface	I
Abbreviations	IV
Maps	V
Introduction	1
Chapter One:	<u>The Cultural and Historical Setting</u> 19
	1. The land and people: an overview
	2. European newcomers and local African societies
	3. The assumption of British political control
Chapter Two:	<u>Indigenous Politics, Colonial Administration and the Rise of Modern African Politics, 1891-1914</u> 54
	1. African political systems and the introduction of colonial rule
	2. African societies, traditional institutions and the new colonial order
	3. Traditional authorities and the rise of modern political organizations
Chapter Three:	<u>Economic and Social Factors in the Development of Modern African Politics</u> 91
	1. Revenue and taxation
	2. Land and labour
	3. The immigrant communities
	4. Migration and economic development
	5. Missionaries and western education
Chapter Four:	<u>The Politics of Early Independent African Churches</u> 135
	1. Joseph Booth and John Chilembwe
	×2. Elliot Kamwana and Charles Domingo
	×3. The 1915 Rising

Chapter Five:	<u>African Groups and the Politics of Inter-War Native Associations</u>	194
	1. Native Associations as pressure groups	
	2. Levi Mumba and the character of Native Associations	
	3. Native Associations, social change and the masses	
	4. Native Associations and African churches	
	5. Native Associations, chiefs and government	
Chapter Six:	<u>The Move to the Politics of Representation and Union</u>	250
	1. Colonial change and local administration	
	2. Closer union and political representation	
	3. The formation of the Nyasaland African Congress	
Chapter Seven:	<u>The Beginnings of the Politics of Mass Nationalism</u>	302
	1. The frustrations of early territorial African politics	
	2. The imposition of the Central African Federation	
	3. Land and African discontent	
	4. Enforced agrarian change and rural disaffection	
	5. Congress and mass political mobilization	
Conclusion		365
Note on Sources		372
Select Bibliography		376



## INTRODUCTION

Although this work is not intended to be an analytical account but rather an historical case-study of the emergence of a nationalist movement in one African colonial territory, it is necessary to provide a detailed examination of the concept of nationalism as employed in this study.

The years of colonial rule in Malawi (formerly Nyasaland) were characterized by the imposition of a political and social system whereby a superior European authority attempted to exercise its will over a territory already populated by Africans. This enforced colonial relationship determined the pattern of political change within the Protectorate, so that any variation in the fundamentals of the relationship was bound to have important repercussions on the total colonial situation.<sup>1</sup> From the earliest years of British rule in Malawi, Africans sought to modify or alter the colonial relationship and it is this sort of African political activity in reaction to alien control and domination that has come to be regarded as a manifestation of nationalism not only in colonial Malawi but also in the other territories of Africa. Thomas Hodgkin, for example, has lumped under the

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1. For a discussion of the concept of the 'colonial situation,' see George Balandier, "La Situation Coloniale: Approche theorique," Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie, 11 (1951), pp.44-79. This article has been translated into English and reprinted in Immanuel Wallerstein, ed., Social Change: The Colonial Situation (New York, 1966), pp.34-61.



general rubric of 'nationalism' "any organization or group that explicitly asserts the rights, claims and aspirations of a given African society (from the level of the language-group to that of 'Pan-Africa') in opposition to European authority, whatever its institutional form and objectives." <sup>2</sup> Others, however, although appreciating the deep roots of African colonial nationalism have tended to confine the use of the term to the post-1945 period with its emergence of nation-wide movements seeking self-government and independence. They have argued that to include every social movement of protest against alien rule as a part of nationalism obscures the political meaning of the concept, blurs the important distinctions that can be made among African responses to the colonial situation, and makes comparative analysis difficult.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, in direct opposition to the two preceding views, some have refused to employ the concept of 'nationalism' believing it to be wholly inapplicable to the African situation, and have instead preferred the adoption of other labels to describe African resistance and assertion.<sup>4</sup> The argument here has been that 'nationalism' as traditionally defined in European political

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2. Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa (London, 1956), p.23. Similar comprehensive definitions of African nationalism have been adopted by David Kimble, A Political History of Ghana (Oxford, 1963), p.xiv, and Robert I. Rotberg, The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), p.2.

3. James S. Coleman, "Nationalism in Tropical Africa," American Political Science Review, 48 (1954), pp.404-426.

4. Lord Hailey's 'Africanism' is the best-known of these other labels. See his An African Survey: Revised 1956 (London, 1957), pp.251-2.

history in the sense of the supreme loyalty of an individual being due to the nation-state,<sup>5</sup> is not meaningful in the African colonial experience. African allegiance and attachment have not been due to the entity of 'nation' but to narrower socio-political units such as the tribe or lineage group. Moreover, common cultural and linguistic characteristics - objective criteria prevalent in Europe - have been virtually absent in African colonial territories, and one is therefore hard put to talk logically about nationalism. Resentment of European domination undoubtedly existed, but the mere expression of African hostility to alien control is not sufficient proof of the existence of nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

In this introduction, we attempt to look more closely at the two schools which accept the use of nationalism as an appropriate concept for describing African responses to the colonial situation and to challenge the final view that the adoption of the term would constitute too radical a departure from traditional European definitions.

Dr. R.I. Rotberg has argued that nationalism in colonial Africa was "similar in content to the earlier Asian and European nationalisms." Within a few years of European penetration and take-over, colonial adminis-

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5. Hans Kohn speaks of nationalism as "a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation state." See his Nationalism: Its Meaning and History (New York, 1955), p.9.

6. For a lucid overall review of the various schools of thought regarding the use or non-use of the term 'nationalism' in colonial Africa, see Martin Kilson, "The Analysis of African Nationalism," World Politics, 10,3 (1958), pp.484-497.



trations had begun to impose upon the indigenous peoples an administrative framework which gradually resulted in Africans coming to share common experiences, common laws, and common aspirations. Not only were "nations in embryo" created, but also a political pattern was provided within which national self-consciousness could grow. At some point, soon after European annexation, African colonial territories "passed into the realm of partial nationhood" and Africans "antagonized" by the character of white rule "while educated in and aware of the ideals of the European national image, eventually asserted themselves with a patriotic fervour that made real the possibility of national self-determination." Led and directed by "upwardly mobile, middle class 'agitators'", Africans "manifested extreme anti-European attitudes, which were in the best tradition, anti-establishment." To analyze the "African revolution" in its struggle to achieve "liberty and equality," Rotberg sketches a "threefold time scale" for viewing the total unfolding of the process, viz., "awakening," "incipient action," and "triumph." Following Hodgkin, Rotberg concludes that it is this process which in its entire evolution can be justifiably called African nationalism, and that the three stages constitute the gradual "rise of different forms of national consciousness."<sup>7</sup>

Professor J.S. Coleman would probably concur in much of this reasoning but would prefer to confine the use of the term 'nationalism' to a much later phase of

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7. R.I. Rotberg, "African Nationalism: Concept or Confusion?" Journal of Modern African Studies, 9 (1966), pp.33-46.

political evolution during the colonial period, perhaps to Rotberg's final stage.<sup>8</sup> There is, then, in exhibition a particular type of African response, namely, that organized by political parties directed by a westernized elite striving to set up an independent nation-state. For Coleman certain characteristics are necessary to depict clearly the stage when a movement may be spoken of as nationalistic in its aims and character, bearing in mind its deep roots and antecedents. For Rotberg and Hodgkin, however, African responses to modify or alter the colonial situation are all nationalistically-oriented.

Students of Africa, therefore, just like students of Europe, have come to disagree among themselves as to what is meant by the slippery concept of 'nationalism.' All, however, would probably accept that when we talk about nations we mean that men identify themselves with a group or national 'image,' and through it with other men with whom they establish a common solidarity and towards whom they generate a feeling of mutual sympathy that is not extended to outsiders. But the criteria for identifying fellow group or national members have varied quite considerably, and it is this which has led to so much debate and argument. Although it is not necessary here to review the literature on nationalism, a brief discussion of similar experiences in other parts of the world would be helpful. Here we will discuss two well-known kinds of

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8. J.S. Coleman, op. cit., See also his Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), pp. 169-170, 419-427.



national self-consciousness, namely those which have developed from (a) common membership of a political association and (b) similar cultural and linguistic characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

The rise of nations through common membership of a political association is best illustrated from the history of France and England. As a result of monarchs over centuries gradually strengthening themselves against the Emperor and the Pope on the one hand and the local barons on the other, they became, in time, the most important focus for loyalty. By setting in motion an increasingly centralized political structure, monarchs eventually created nations from which (with the development of a common legal system and the spread of a national language and literature) national consciousness and sentiment grew. At this stage, therefore, the idea of nationality was co-extensive with political allegiance. Such a situation never arose in colonial Africa for at no time did the colonial rulers evoke mass loyalty and sympathy from their colonial wards. For one thing, the European oligarchy differed racially and culturally from the majority of the population. Politically, this meant that the alien colonial power could hardly ever claim for itself a natural legitimacy stemming from common racial

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9. For a more detailed discussion of the various ways in which nations have come into being, see Morris Ginsberg, Nationalism: A Reappraisal (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 6-23 and S.I. Benn and R.S. Peters, Social Principles and the Democratic State (London, 1959), Chap. 11. Much of my discussion is based on these two works.

and cultural characteristics. Although, as in Western Europe, political organization preceded national consciousness, Africans never gave their allegiance and attachment to the colonial authorities ruling their territories.

Another type of national self-consciousness that may be identified is that which has arisen from the recognition of similar cultural and linguistic characteristics which gradually found expression in political unity. These objective factors constituted the basis of European nationalism during the nineteenth century which led to the formation of such nations as Germany and Italy and to the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires. Here the national spirit as manifested in language and custom preceded political organization, but the two eventually became related. As Hegel and others argued, only through the creation of a nation-state could the national spirit find its fullest expression. In order to pursue common interests and aspirations, the nation had to seek self-government and independence. This particular kind of national self-consciousness rarely existed in colonial Africa where considerable cultural and linguistic diversities pervaded most territories. In colonial Malawi, for instance, there was no complete linguistic, ethnic or cultural unity among the various peoples,<sup>10</sup> and recent

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10. Two main languages were spoken - Chinyanja and Chitumbuka - and numerous ethnic groups with cultural differences existed. For instance, the Ngoni and Tumbuka are patrilineal in descent and inheritance and virilocal in residence; the Tonga, Cewa, Yao, Nyanja and Lomwe peoples are matrilineal and uxori-local.



events have shown the same to be true of many other states in Africa.

But it is evident that such objective factors are by no means essential to the existence of nationalism. Although their absence or presence may have a bearing on the degree of strength of national unity, they are not collectively or individually indispensable for national sentiment to be engendered. A nation cannot be simply viewed as a group with common cultural and linguistic characteristics but must also be regarded as an entity whose very existence lies in the hearts and minds of those who believe they belong to it. As Hans Kohn reminds us, "a living and active corporate will" is an "essential element" in any definition of nationalism.

"It is this will which we call nationalism, a state of mind inspiring the large majority of a people and claiming to inspire all its members." 11

Switzerland clearly shows that there is no necessary link between language and national sentiment. Belgium is generally considered to be a nation despite the existence of different religious groupings, while the citizens of the United States have no common ancestry. Numerous other cases could be cited to show that the subjective idea of nationalism may emerge in the absence of objective factors. Moreover, such objective elements existed for centuries in Europe without producing nationalism. German was a language spoken by thousands for centuries in Central Europe, who also shared other cultural attributes, but no

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11. H. Kohn, op. cit., pp.9-11.

German nation developed until it was created by German nationalism. Although a German nation was for long contemplated and mooted by the Holy Roman Emperors, it would still be correct to argue that it was only when Germans began to regard their common characteristics as particularly important, distinguishing and marking them off as a group from other groups, that a national 'image' was developed and an emotional loyalty to a German nation aroused. Only then did a sense of belonging appear and 'German' become a focus for loyalties.

In Central and Eastern Europe, therefore, linguistic and cultural criteria determined who belonged to the national group. In colonial Africa, however, such factors were hard to find in most of the territories. Instead, a common national image, a focus for loyalties, was created through a common repudiation by Africans of alien control. National self-consciousness in colonial Africa was exhibited in a unity of purpose discovered in striving for self-government and independence. Just as in Europe, Africans gradually became self-consciously Nigerians or Nyasalanders - groups seized with a 'passion of nationalism' and a community of feeling and will - functioning within the physical and political framework established by the European colonialists. African nationalist leaders gradually came to regard the colonial territory (often arbitrarily carved out by the European powers) as the basic unit of social action and the area for which they claimed the right of self-determination. Although the various social groups within the colonial



territory may not have shared a common culture, they did share "at the very minimum a common authority capable of maintaining itself and propagating its values." It was within the framework of such a common authority, that Africans began "to identify more and more with the nation-in-creation."<sup>12</sup> As in Western Europe, political organization preceded national consciousness,<sup>13</sup> and the criterion for determining who belonged to the national group was a unity of purpose found in common resentment to alien control.

If one accepts that the criteria for identifying fellow patriots or nationals vary considerably, and that one of these is a unity of purpose discovered in the struggle for independence waged against an alien ruler, then nationalism is a concept appropriate to describe certain African responses to the colonial situation. With this definition, we are now able to meet the statements of those who prefer labels other than that of nationalism in the colonial African context. We would agree with Lord Hailey in his first statement (elaborating on his preference for the use of 'Africanism' rather than nationalism)<sup>14</sup> that "the population of most of the countries of Africa south of the Sahara consists of people who have been brought together under one form of government by the accidents of history." This was, however,

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12. I. Wallerstein, op. cit., Introduction, p.2.

13. See D. Kimble, op. cit., Chap.13 for a good discussion of the growth of national consciousness in colonial Ghana.

14. Lord Hailey, op. cit., p.251.

also true of many European countries such as France, where as a result of political and military factors areas not basically French were brought together into France. "According to Duhamel," observes Morris Ginsberg, "ten out of the thirty-six provinces of which France then (in 1929) consisted were not French three hundred years ago.... That the process of nation-making was not spontaneous was clearly shown by Renan:

"Why does Languedoc belong to France? Neither race nor history nor the character of the population account for the union. The reason is that in the thirteenth century Paris kings exerted unceasing pressure to bring this about." 15

We would further accept Hailey's observation that African colonial territories "have for the most part no tradition of a common origin." As we have already seen, this was also the case with countries like Switzerland and the United States, but one does not here refrain from talking about Swiss or American nationalism. The mere absence of such objective factors as language, culture or tradition of origin does not necessarily mean the non-existence of the subjective idea of nationhood. It is, however, Hailey's final statement that requires rebuttal, namely, his assertion that Africans had no "common outlook on their political future." As we have seen, and as will be more obvious when we consider the emergence of a nationalist movement in colonial Malawi, Africans did possess a common political outlook and a unity of purpose in their attempts to seek liberation from colonial rule.

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15. M. Ginsberg, op. cit., p.7.



All this is not to suggest that we can to-day invariably speak of African nations in the sense of belonging (felt or experienced) by the majority of the people to a nation. It is probable that few Africans feel that they belong to a nation, a feeling which involves a sentiment of attachment akin to patriotism. The community of feeling and will, prevalent during the last years of colonial rule, disappeared with the attainment of the common goal of independence, and African states now find that they have inherited diverse ethnic and linguistic elements which have to be welded together into working units. The process of nation-building has still to be completed in most of the new states of Africa.

Nevertheless, there is still validity in the argument that colonial African nationalism may be considered as a political movement which depends on a feeling of collective grievance against alien control. The nationalist grievance was collective and the collectivity in colonial Africa was the nation-in-creation.<sup>16</sup>

Hodgkin, Rotberg, Coleman and others are therefore justified in employing the term nationalism to describe African responses to the colonial situation, but their various definitions of the concept require certain revisions. In many ways, Hodgkin and Rotberg are correct in viewing African nationalism as a process evolving through a series of 'stages'.<sup>17</sup> The post-1945 mass

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16. See also K.R. Minogue, Nationalism (London, 1967), p.25.

17. For another scheme of 'stages' based on the criterion of objectives, see J. van Velsen, "Trends in African Nationalism in Southern Rhodesia," Kroniek van Afrika, 4,2 (1964), pp.139-157. It should be noted that in all of these 'phase' or 'stage' identifications of African nationalism, reality, of course, is much less tidy.

political movements, for instance, were in many colonial territories closely related to the inter-war political groups. But the precursors of mass nationalist movements cannot themselves be regarded as manifestations of nationalism. Using Rotberg's own words, they did not in most territories adopt "extreme anti-European attitudes," or attempt to pursue an "anti-establishment" programme, or agitate to overthrow the colonial status quo and achieve self-government and independent statehood. They operated, instead, like pressure groups and sought to exert influence on the government within the framework of the colonial situation. Moreover, at no time did they gain the support of the masses who continued passively to accept the "fundamentals of the colonial relationship."<sup>18</sup> It is the post second World War nationalist movements that possess these characteristics and are committed to the overthrow of the colonial state and the replacement of it by a new political and social order. To use the term nationalism, as Rotberg does, as synonymous with "redress of grievances"<sup>19</sup> is to use it in such a broad way that it tends to blur the important distinctions that can and must be made among African responses to the colonial situation. More importantly, such an all-embracing

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18. Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson, eds., The Political Awakening of Africa (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), Introduction, pp.8-10. Such movements of petition and protest were characteristic of most of the territories of colonial Africa, particularly during the inter-war period. See, for instance, such works as J.S. Coleman (Nigeria), op. cit.; J. van Velsen, op. cit.; and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of 'Mau Mau' (New York, 1966).

19. R.I. Rotberg (Central Africa), op. cit., p.2.



definition obscures the political meaning of the concept "for nationalism must be predicated on at least the aspiration of a future self-governing nation,"<sup>20</sup> and this is a feature mainly of the post-1945 African political movements.

Professor Coleman's description of nationalism as "the terminal form of colonial protest"<sup>21</sup> is therefore an apt one in the African colonial context. But his particular definition of nationalism requires further refinement. By emphasizing the role of an acculturated elite striving for independence of a common alien ruler, he minimises the important political role of the masses (and, as we shall see in our study of Malawi, the role of the petty rural bourgeoisie) in the national movement for independence. The impression is conveyed that mass disenchantment with colonial rule was artificially stimulated by a small group of western-educated elements and that there was nothing spontaneous about the mass followings they acquired. Recent research, however, amply demonstrates that issues capable of evoking mass discontent and bringing it to a climax existed by the early 1950s in many colonial territories, and that the subsequent rise of the masses gave depth to nationalist demands and enabled the national appeal to strike home along a broad front. When the educated elite decided to lend leadership to the agitated rural populace, then the nucleus of a mass anti-colonial

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20. C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, op. cit., p.349.

21. J.S. Coleman (A.P.S.R.), op. cit., p.140.

movement was created and nationalism began.<sup>22</sup>

For a movement in a colonial situation to be called nationalistic in its aims and character, therefore, it must possess the following major characteristics: it must seek self-government and independent statehood; it must be led and guided by an educated elite which is conscious of the aspirations of the masses and is willing to voice their discontent; and it must command a mass following.<sup>23</sup> As a conceptual tool, this restrictive definition is preferred to the all-embracing ones suggested by other writers. But to analyze and describe the rise and emergence of a full-scale nationalist movement requires, of course, a more comprehensive approach which will permit consideration of all the various threads which have gone to make up a complex pattern. The present thesis is concerned with the development of African political groups and organizations in

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22. See, for example, Lionel Cliffe, "Nationalism and the Reaction to Enforced Agricultural Improvement in Tanganyika during the colonial period," unpublished E.A.I.S.R. conference paper, 1965; J.M. Lonsdale, "Rural Resistance and Mass Political Mobilization amongst the Luo of Western Kenya," East African Academy seminar paper, 1965; and Martin Kilson, "Sociological Aspects of African Politics," Ghana Journal of Sociology (1966), pp.1-6.

23. See also the excellent article by J.M. Lonsdale, "The Emergence of African Nations," African Affairs, 67, 266 (1968), pp.11-28 for a similar set of characteristics. It should be noted that our present discussion is concerned only with territorial, colony-wide nationalism and not with regional or other types of sub-nationalisms. For 'tribal' nationalism, see, for example, Philip D. Curtin, "Nationalism in Africa, 1945-1965," Review of Politics, 28,2 (1966), pp.143-153. For a discussion of the distinction between 'tribalism' and territorial-wide 'nationalism', see P.H. Gulliver, ed., Tradition and Transition in East Africa (London, 1969), Introduction.



colonial Malawi and the eventual emergence of a nationalist movement. In our examination of African political groups, the stages of transition of movements are subsumed under headings which designate phases in a continuous but irregular process.<sup>24</sup> In each of these phases, we seek, among other things, to characterize a political movement by differences in ideology, leadership and participation and show, finally, how a conjunction between the three characteristics of a nationalist movement was achieved.

The growth of modern African politics in colonial Africa re-defined the boundaries of African political activity. Prior to the introduction of colonial rule, and even during the colonial period itself, politics took place within tribal communities. With the establishment of a colonial administrative framework encompassing the various traditional societies, there was created the possibility of African political action on a wider level. The present thesis is not concerned with intra-tribal politics but with the new and modern African political activity at the territorial level. The arena of political debate, argument and struggle for the purposes of this thesis is the new colonial political system and not the tribal political system. The present work, therefore, is only concerned with one sphere of African political activity in colonial Malawi. Another

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24. No attempt is made to argue for smooth transition from one phase to the next. Orderly sequences exist only in analysis and ideal types.

possible approach would be to consider the inter-relations between the tribal and colonial political systems. Research on politics in colonial Africa has only just begun to focus on the co-existence of these two systems<sup>25</sup> and few detailed studies have appeared as yet to enable us to consider the implications of this approach for the present work. Moreover, studies concentrating on the inter-relations between tribal and colonial political systems cannot be conducted for Malawi as yet until government restrictions on access to local archives have been removed and until greater interest has been shown by scholars in the peoples of this fascinating land.

The material of this study is arranged chronologically. In the first chapter we describe the relevant features of the physical, cultural and historical setting of Malawi which have a bearing on political developments during the colonial period. The remaining chapters of the thesis are organized on two levels. First, there is an analysis of the processes of social change which not only created situations pre-disposing the peoples of Malawi to political action but also conditioned the growth and development of African political movements. Secondly, there is a detailed description and analysis

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25. See the two following essays by J.F. Ade Ajayi on this approach: "The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism," in T.O. Ranger, ed., Emerging Themes of African History (Nairobi, 1968), pp.189-200; "Colonialism: An Episode in African History," in L.H. Gann and P. Duignan, eds., The History and Politics of Colonialism 1870-1914 (Cambridge, 1969), pp.497-509.



of African political movements up to about 1958 which may be taken as the time when a full-scale nationalist movement came into being in colonial Malawi.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Cultural and Historical Setting.

#### The land and people: an overview

Stretching down the southern part of the Great Rift Valley of Africa, Malawi is a narrow, land-locked strip of territory extending from the frontiers of southern Tanzania on the north to near the Zambezi on the south, and bounded on the north-west by Zambia and on the south-east and south-west by Mozambique. Comprising a land area of about 37,000 square miles, Malawi is nearly three-quarters the area of England (or about one and a quarter times the size of Scotland). A land of great natural beauty, more than half of its length of 560 miles borders on the great lake of the same name.<sup>1</sup> Lake Malawi lies along the eastern side of the upper part of the country. From the southern end of the lake issues the Shire River which flows southwards into the Zambezi, which in turn empties into the Indian Ocean. The southern tip of Malawi is 226 miles from the Indian Ocean seaport of Beira, in Mozambique, with which it is linked by a railway crossing the Zambezi. Malawi is essentially the watershed of the lake and the Shire and it was in accordance with this geographical factor that most of its boundaries were fixed,

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1. Known as Lake Nyasa until January 1965 when its name was changed to Lake Malawi by the Malawi Government. This new name has yet to be ratified by Tanzania and Mozambique, both of which border on the lake. It should be noted that the forms Nyasaland and Malawi are used interchangeably in this work except, of course, in direct quotations. For a more detailed geographical discussion of Malawi, see J.C. Pike and G.T. Rimmington, Malawi: A Geographical Study (London, 1965).



in the 1890s, by the European powers. Despite their length and dispersion, neither the Shire nor the Zambezi have come to constitute great commercial waterways for trade since the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the gradual silting up of the Shire from the 1880s, and the consequent decline of this water system as an effective means of communication with the outside world, was to be an important factor in hindering economic development in Malawi.

Steep, broken topography is characteristic of almost the whole of Malawi. Beyond the plains to the west of the lake, which is itself part of the Great Rift Valley, the escarpment rises abruptly to undulating plateau areas between 3,000 and 4,000 feet above sea-level, punctuated by mountain masses one or two thousand feet higher. In the northern region (land area: 10,400 square miles), which lies along the northern part of the lake's western shore and which extends over the area north of Nkhota-Khota, the high country consists of the cool and sparsely populated Nyika plateau which rises to over 8,000 feet in places and the rather similar Vipya mountains. Because of these high, bleak, and wind-swept plateaux, no district in the northern region is largely populated and most people are gathered together along the lakeshore. Moreover, the fact that these plateaux plunge steeply to a narrow lake littoral has made the hinterland virtually inaccessible to lake transport. And since the southern railway line was never extended to the northern region, the north has become remote and, more importantly, severely handicapped in its economic development. This

poverty of communications, when coupled with the area's generally unsatisfactory soil, has led to it becoming the most undeveloped part of Malawi. In some favourable lakeshore centres, such as Karonga and Nkhota-Khota, Africans have been able to cultivate cotton and rice successfully. But, generally, from the late 1880s, the northern peoples have been compelled to migrate elsewhere in search of work to earn the cash to satisfy the increasingly diverse wants that Europeans, mainly missionaries, have stimulated among them.

In the central region (land area: 13,819 square miles), the high country is chiefly rolling fertile plain which, especially in the Dedza and Lilongwe districts, has become heavily settled during the last thirty years. The early lack of sufficient markets and adequate communications was slowly rectified from the 1930s, thus greatly assisting the growth of African cash-crop production, particularly in fire-cured tobacco.

The southern region (land area: 12,262 square miles), which lies on both sides of the Shire to the south of the lake, is the most densely populated part of Malawi, a fact which reflects its greater proportion of fertile soils and dependable water supplies. During the colonial period, the region contained just about half the total population of the country. Comprising a series of hills, some of which, particularly the Shire Highlands, are blessed with good agricultural soil, it attracted a number of European planters during the colonial era. Considerable emphasis was placed on European agriculture



to build up the economy of the country and all the Protectorate's major schemes of capital investment came to be focussed in and around the Shire Highlands. It was also here that the twin commercial towns of Blantyre and Limbe grew up as well as the administrative capital, Zomba. This concentration of the administrative, commercial and planting aspects of European enterprise made the Shire Highlands the largest centre of employment for Africans in Malawi.

At the extreme southern end of Malawi, however, the Shire falls away towards the slightly-peopled Zambezi Valley and the land here is only a few hundred feet above sea-level. The low altitude of the area results in higher temperatures than in the Shire Highlands and this has restricted the settlement of Europeans. African cash-crop farming has become prominent in the Shire Valley and cotton has been successfully cultivated as it has, to a lesser extent, along the humid lake littoral in the Upper Shire district. The development of peasant crops in Malawi during the colonial period did not go so far as in Ghana or Uganda. Nevertheless, steady progress was made especially in parts of the central and southern regions. The growing importance of peasant production was to be of great significance in maintaining the character of Nyasaland as a tropical dependency. It also provided Africans with a fairly sturdy economic basis for their political activities in the face of local and outside European assertions of dominance and control.

Malawi being primarily an agricultural country, the

large majority of its inhabitants are therefore engaged in farming, although at any given time a considerable proportion of the country's man-power has, since the turn of the century, been found working in neighbouring territories. In 1960, it was estimated that about 73,500 migrated in search of employment and that the number working abroad in that year was about 159,500. Migrant workers have come from all three regions but migration has been greatest from the northern region and smallest from the southern region. Where opportunities for local employment and for cash-crop production are greatest, so migration is lowest as a proportion of the work force.

Malawi's first full-scale and scientifically based census was completed in September 1966. The final analysis showed the country's total population to be 4,039,583 - an overall density of 111 people per square mile of land area. Some 95 per cent. of the population live in the rural areas and the regional distribution is as follows:

Southern	2,067,140
Central	1,474,952
Northern	497,491

With the exception of about 13,000 Asians and Coloured persons, and about 9,000 Europeans, the population is entirely African. About four-fifths of the Africans are members of five large tribal groups, the Cewa, Lomwe, Nyanja, Yao and Ngoni, while the rest belong to a number of smaller tribes.

Malawi's modern borders are not co-extensive with the patterns of ethnic distribution or the boundaries of historic empires. The central and southern regions, together with some of the eastern parts of Zambia and neighbouring areas in Mozambique, have been inhabited



from a relatively early date by branches of a single cultural and linguistic group known as the Malawi (also referred to in early records as the Maravi).<sup>2</sup> Of these various branches, the three main ones in Malawi by the beginning of the nineteenth century were the Cewa, Nyanja and Manganja. The Shire Highlands and the Shire Valley were inhabited by the Nyanja and Manganja respectively while the Cewa lived in the areas near to the southern half of the lake and west of it.<sup>3</sup> By the early 1800s, a more complex ethnic pattern had been established in the northern region of Malawi. A number of different peoples, including the Tumbuka,<sup>4</sup> Tonga<sup>5</sup> and Nkhonde,<sup>6</sup> occupied the highland areas and the adjoining lakeshore. Yet all of these ethnically heterogeneous peoples throughout the Malawi region shared much in common. All were agriculturalists, first and foremost, though some cattle were kept by a number of groups. Culturally and linguistically the peoples were not too

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2. For the Maravi, see E.A. Alpers, "The Mutapa and Malawi political systems to the time of the Ngoni invasions," in T.O. Ranger, ed., Aspects of Central African History (London, 1968), pp. 17-26, and J.M. Schoffoleers, M'Bona the Guardian-Spirit of the Mang'anja, B.Litt. Oxford, 1966.

3. For historical and cultural details of these three peoples, see J.M. Schoffoleers, op. cit.,

4. See T. Cullen Young, Notes on the History of the Tumbuka-Kamanga Peoples in the Northern Province of Nyasaland (London, 1932).

5. J. van Velsen, "Notes on the History of the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland," African Studies, 18, 3 (1959), pp. 105-117.

6. Godfrey Wilson, The Constitution of Ngonde (London, 1939), Rhodes-Livingstone Paper, No. 3.

separated. Though their languages were distinct, all were related and many were mutually intelligible. Matrilineal descent and inheritance and uxori-local marriage patterns were almost everywhere adhered to. Religious systems were also similar combining faith in the powers of dead ancestors with magic and witchcraft. Moreover, by the early 1800s, all the peoples had basically village-centred political systems. Larger scale political structures had been created and some still existed. But these had developed little in the way of central government institutions and were thus not successful in establishing effective centralized control. They were superimposed on a pre-existing village-centred pattern so that their degree of internal coherence was small and they remained fragile. People, then, lived in villages, small groups of which bore allegiance to minor, independent chiefs.

In spite of the trading involvement of some of the peoples with the East African coast, Malawi, in the early nineteenth century, was hardly touched by outside influences and ideas. All this, however, was to be changed from the 1840s by the advent of the Ngoni raiders from the south, the entry of the Arab and Yao slavers from the east, and the settlement of a small number of forceful Kololo from the Upper Zambezi. It would be appropriate here to consider these three groups of intruders briefly.

Of the handful of Arabs and Swahili that came to Malawi, the most famous was a Swahili from Zanzibar who,



in the mid-1840s, set himself up as ruler of the present day town of Nkhota-Khota on the western side of the lake. After his defeat of the local Cewa chiefs, he came to style himself Jumbe, 'Sultan of Marimba,' and began to turn his new settlement into an important centre of Islam, also making an industry of growing food for caravans and of ferrying slaves in dhows from west to east across Lake Malawi.<sup>7</sup> At about the same time, the Yao were being forced out of their home in northern Mozambique and were moving towards the southern end of the lake. Eventually, three main Yao sections settled in southern Malawi: the Mangoce Yao in the Shire Highlands, the Macinga Yao in the upper reaches of the Shire River around Fort Johnston and also in parts of the Zomba district, and the Masaninga Yao along the south-eastern arm of the lake. Further small waves found their way to the Dedza district and others settled along the southern half of the lakeshore as far as Salima.<sup>8</sup> Because of their previous links with the East coast Arabs and through their possession of firearms, the Yao groups were soon able to assert their control over the disorganized and unarmed Nyanja. Having established their hegemony, the Yao then turned to either trading or capturing slaves for the coastal merchants. The rapid

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7. George Shepperson, "The Jumbe of Kota Kota and Some Aspects of the History of Islam in British Central Africa," in I.M. Lewis, ed., Islam in Tropical Africa (London, 1966), pp.193-205.

8. Johanna B. Abdallah, Chikala Cha Wayao (The Yaos) (Zomba, 1919); J. Clyde Mitchell, The Yao Village (Manchester, 1956), pp.22-26.

growth of the slave trade soon created the need for stronger leadership among the Yao and a whole series of chieftaincies developed which became involved in bitter internecine struggles out of which emerged the more powerful Yao chiefs (mainly Macinga and Masaninga) who were to give the nascent colonial government such a difficult time in the 1890s. The increasing trade in slaves attracted small numbers of Arabs from the East coast and the Yao began to be subject to the influence of Islam and Arab culture.<sup>9</sup>

Help for the stricken Manganja people of the Shire Valley came from an unexpected quarter. During his travels in the Zambezi region in the late 1850s, the famous British missionary-explorer, David Livingstone, had associated himself with the Kololo, a people of Sotho origin and at that time dominant over the Lozi on the Upper Zambezi. Whilst exploring the Shire region, Livingstone employed some Kololo porters whom he left behind at their own request near Chikwawa at the end of his expedition in 1863. Through the possession of firearms and because a terrible famine in the area at this time had rendered the Manganja helpless, the few Kololo, numbering sixteen, were able to become dominant in the district. The Kololo ruled the indigenous peoples harshly but helped to save them from probable defeat and extinction at the hands of the Yao. Although holding large numbers of

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9. Henry Rowley, The Story of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (London, 1866), pp. 112-113, 160-9, 217, 337-343; W.H. Rangeley, "The Ayao," The Nyasaland Journal, 16,1 (1963), pp.7-27.



domestic slaves, they did not permit these to be sold and did not themselves engage in the slave trade, also foiling various attempts by the Yao and others to find captives in the area.<sup>10</sup>

While the growth of the slave trade and the expansion of the Yao were spreading havoc and destruction in parts of southern Malawi, Ngoni invaders were setting themselves up as the ruling aristocrats in the central and northern regions. The Ngoni were the descendants of Zulu migrants who had been driven out of Zululand in the 1820s and who on their way north had incorporated into their ranks the survivors of the various African groups they had defeated. Amongst the several groups that moved away from Natal were the Jere of Zwangendaba and the Maseko of Ngwane. With their unified political system, centred upon a paramount chief, and their superior military organization, the two Ngoni groups were generally able to overcome the peoples of Malawi. The main body under Zwangendaba broke up near Lake Tanganyika in the mid-1840s and a major section under Mbelwa settled in northern Malawi on the Vipya plateau. From here a number of raiding parties were launched against the Tumbuka and Tonga peoples and many captives taken. One of the raiding parties dispatched by Mbelwa was led by Ciwere Ndhlovu who set up an independent Ngoni state over the Cewa people in the modern Dowa district in the hills near

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10. W.H.J. Rangeley, "The Makololo of Dr. Livingstone," The Nyasaland Journal, 12,1 (1959), pp.59-78; John Buchanan, Shire Highlands (London, 1885), pp.93-7; Duff Macdonald, Africana (2 vols. London, 1882), 1, pp.196-203.

Domira Bay. The Maseko Ngoni, after journeying for some years east of Lake Malawi, eventually returned to the Malawi region and founded yet another state in the areas around Dedza and Ncheu. From this base in Cewa country, the Maseko Ngoni raided into the Shire Highlands, harassed the Nyanja and weaker Yao sections, and thus added to the turmoil of southern Malawi. But despite their warlike character and the havoc and terror caused by their raids, the Ngoni provided order and security for all those who lived within their states. Like the Kololo, the Ngoni do not seem to have taken any part in the slave trade, raiding other peoples primarily for cattle, grain and people to supplement the manpower of the state; and captives from raided societies were assimilated into the Ngoni tribal structure and could rise to positions of prominence in Ngoni society.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1870s, the social equilibrium of much of Malawi had been shattered. In many parts there was a widespread breakdown of law and order as African societies reeled under the impact of Ngoni forays and the trade in slaves by the Yao. A few areas remained, however, where groups of agriculturalists retained their political independence; and within some of the new military states there was also a semblance of order and security. It was to such a mixed and changing situation that Europeans

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11. Yesaya M. Chibambo, My Ngoni of Nyasaland (London, 1942); Margaret Read, The Ngoni of Nyasaland (London, 1956); J.A. Barnes, Politics in a Changing Society (Manchester, 1967), pp.1-63; J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath (Evanston, 1966), Chap.5.



began to enter in increasing numbers from the late 1870s.

These new white intruders were to prevent the stabilizing of African societies around Ngoni or Yao power. What was more important, they were themselves to become the pioneers of a new era of even more profound change and disturbance. We shall concern ourselves with the activities of these European newcomers in the next section of this chapter. For the moment, however, we may note that the settlement of missionaries, traders and planters was not sufficient, during the 1880s, to undermine warfare and the slave trade. The eradication of these called for proper government with effective jurisdiction. Eventually, in 1891, a British Government proclaimed a Protectorate over Malawi.

Colonial rule broke the power of the larger Yao and Ngoni states. In the southern region, a series of military campaigns led to the dismantling of the more substantial Yao chiefdoms which had been built up consequent upon the growth of the slave trade. The result was that the Yao reverted to their traditional village-centred pattern organized into a number of small autonomous chiefdoms. Moreover, they appear to have been culturally similar to the Nyanja whom they had invaded, the one major distinction being that some Yao sections adhered to Islam. As for the Ngoni states, in the central and northern regions, they were either broken up militarily or splintered spontaneously. Under colonial rule the large military towns of the Ngoni broke up into smaller villages and many of the captives broke away to

rejoin their own people. Since the Ngoni kingdoms contained a majority of members captured from the surrounding populations, the Ngoni groups became linguistically, and to some extent culturally, assimilated to the people whom they had subjugated. Similarly, the Kololo, because they were few in numbers, were not able to assert a new way of life on the people amongst whom they settled but rather adopted the language and customs of the Manganja population in the Shire Valley.

Thus instead of Malawi being divided up into a number of compact states each possessing a well-defined sense of separate political identity, it has been possible for the peoples of the country to develop a sense of national unity which reflects the underlying similarity of their cultural traditions. Not even the large and prolonged immigration of the Lomwe people into the Shire Highlands from Mozambique during the present century has altered this situation. By 1945, the Lomwe were the second largest ethnic element in the Protectorate but they had become largely assimilated to the people amongst whom they had settled. Lomwe intrusion from Mozambique was in small matrilineally linked family groups which either attached themselves to existing Yao and Nyanja headmen or established new villages of their own. The traditional organization of the immigrants appears to have been similar to that of the Yao and Nyanja and they have been absorbed into each others' villages and chieftaincies. Whatever cultural differences that may originally have existed have also gradually disappeared and there has



been increasing intermarriage between these southern peoples.

Nyasaland was thus spared a struggle between the national movement and tribal sub-nationalisms because the highly fragmented, small-scale social structure prevented the formation of coherent, self-sustaining power centres with separatist political goals. And not only was there no dominant tribe in the Protectorate but the various ethnic groups were mixed together in many districts. The upheavals caused by the slave trade, Ngoni forays, labour migration abroad, and the concentration in the southern region of the major employment opportunities for Africans within Nyasaland, all contributed to this mixture and homogenizing process. Even if the various peoples of Nyasaland still referred to themselves as members of a particular ethnic group, nevertheless, during the colonial period, they also became increasingly conscious of their identity as Nyasalanders. Under colonial rule, Africans were to share many common experiences and a national self-consciousness was able to grow that was unhindered by any strong emotional feelings of tribalism. As a result, modern African political activity, in all its various forms, was to be essentially non-tribal and when, eventually, a truly nationalist movement was created in the 1950s it was to reflect the sense of national unity prevailing among the African peoples of Nyasaland.

But before concerning ourselves with the character of colonial rule and the development of modern African political activity, it is important to examine those

features of the pre-colonial environment and historical evolution of African peoples during the second half of the nineteenth century which have a bearing on subsequent developments during the colonial period. In particular, it is of importance to consider the impact of Christian missions in pre-colonial Malawi. Early exposure to western education was to enable certain African peoples to take the lead in modern political activity while others, without the experiences of missionary influence, were to remain on the fringes of the new political developments. It is also necessary to know something about the character of the various African societies when the new colonial order began as this will enable us to explain the different African reactions to the introduction of colonial rule. Finally, it is necessary to look at some of the factors which led to the British take-over of Malawi as this will provide the background for discussion in subsequent chapters of British colonial policy and administration. The rest of this chapter, therefore, will attempt to provide a sketch of the peoples of Malawi and of their history mainly since their contacts, from the 1860s, with European missionaries and traders to the time, in 1891, when a British Protectorate was proclaimed over the country.

#### European newcomers and African societies

Of all the band of intrepid explorers who trekked across Africa during the nineteenth century, it was the travels and investigations of David Livingstone which had



the greatest impact on Europe. His lengthy journeys and voluminous writings captured the imagination of the British public and increasingly directed British interest to the Central African regions - the areas of his major explorations. Livingstone captured the public sympathy in his endearing remarks on the African peoples and their customs, and in his disclosures of the brutal Arab and Yao slave trade with its resultant burnt villages, slaughter and devastation of crops. His scheme for the 'regeneration' of Africa through the allied promotion of Christianity, commerce and civilization received wide attention. His programme of action propounded that the interior regions had to be penetrated along the waterways by both missionaries and traders who would then be able to provide Africans with a living demonstration of Christian morality and religion and also legitimate commerce. Partly because of his approbation of the line of communications into the interior offered by the Zambezi-Shire water system; partly because of his laudatory remarks on the Shire Highlands as an area eminently suitable for white colonization; and partly because of his belief that the Shire Valley was favourably suited for cotton-growing, deep interest was aroused in missionary and commercial societies in Britain about operating in the Malawi region.<sup>12</sup>

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12. D. and C. Livingstone, Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi and its Tributaries (London, 1865); J. Simmons, Livingstone and Africa (London, 1955); G. Shepperson, ed., David Livingstone and the Rovuma (Edinburgh, 1965).

It was Livingstone's recommendation of the Shire Highlands as an area admirably suited for European settlement that brought the first white missionaries to Malawi. Under its Bishop, Charles Mackenzie, the high Anglican Universities' Mission to Central Africa (U.M.C.A.) arrived in 1861 and chose Magomero in the present-day Chiradzulu district as the scene for its operations. It proved an ill-fated venture. The antagonism of the Yao slavers; the high incidence of disease at Magomero; and the long and difficult lines of communication to the Zambezi which led to the mission's often being without adequate provisions and supplies, all contributed to its withdrawal within a few years.<sup>13</sup> It was a disastrous failure which discredited Livingstone for a while, and some years were to pass before other missionary societies decided to found stations in the region. With the improvement of communications between Europe and the East coast coupled with advances in medicine, conditions were created by the 1870s to respond more effectively to Livingstone's fervent appeals. With his death in 1873, his life and the fame of his achievements now heralded a movement of missions to Central Africa. Almost simultaneously there arose in the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland a movement in favour of organizing mission stations in Malawi, with the Zambezi and Shire Rivers providing the inland route and Lake Malawi and the Shire

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13. Owen Chadwick, Mackenzie's Grave (London, 1959); Henry Rowley, op. cit.; Reginald Coupland, Kirk on the Zambezi (Oxford, 1928).



Highlands constituting the fields of endeavour.

Towards the end of 1874, the Free Church of Scotland decided to launch the Livingstonia Mission, an "institution at once industrial and educational" in concert with Livingstone's own views that a mission to the Zambezi region should not only be concerned with Christianity but with training in practical crafts and educational pursuits as well. The first party of missionaries arrived in Malawi in mid-1875 and chose Cape Maclear on the western side of the lake, thirty miles from its southern end, as its site. The negative attitude of the locally dominant Yao, however, together with the unhealthy and isolated position of Cape Maclear, militated against the successful spread of missionary enterprise. The Macinga and Masaninga Yao, the two most powerful branches of the Yao, were in no need of external allies so as to be drawn to the Europeans. Moreover, with the settlement of numbers of coastal Arabs and the growing influence of Islam and Arab culture, these Yao sections were becoming acquainted with an alternative historic religion which may have helped to restrict the appeal of Livingstonia.<sup>14</sup> But the greatest barrier to missionary influence lay in the slave trading activities of the Yao. By opposing and attempting to destroy that trade, the missionaries were purposely attacking the very basis of Yao economic power and thus making virtually impossible the cultivation of compatible relations between the two

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14. W.H.J. Rangeley, "The Amacinga Ayao," The Nyasaland Journal, 15,2 (1962), pp.40-70.

groups. It was therefore not surprising that little use was made of the missionaries during their six years' sojourn at Cape Maclear and that tension between individual Yao chieftains and the mission should increase as the latter gave refuge to Nyanja fugitives from Yao villages to bolster the ranks of its subjects. But even though the number of settlers at the mission increased, the prevalence of tsetse-fly and lack of arable land soon forced it to turn refugees away as there were no means of feeding them. Hot and unhealthy, Cape Maclear further took a heavy toll on the white staff before it was evacuated in 1881 and Livingstonia transferred to Bandawe in Tongaland along the western shores of Lake Malawi.<sup>15</sup> The failure of Livingstonia and other Christian missions to penetrate Yaoland effectively was to have important consequences for the development of modern African politics in this area. There were to be few Muslim Yao literates here in touch with the 'new' world to start up modern vehicles of political activity. New forms of political action were hardly to be developed among the Yao of the Upper Shire during the colonial period and, in practice, politics remained essentially tribal politics.

A different pattern existed in the Shire Highlands where the Blantyre Mission of the Church of Scotland established itself in 1876. The local Yao were of the Mangochi section. Forced to migrate southwards by the Macinga Yao, they found themselves farther away from the

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15. K.J. McCracken, Livingstonia Mission and the evolution of Malawi, 1875-1939, Ph.D. Cambridge, 1967, Chap.3.



main east coast trade routes and with fewer opportunities for extending their power. Chief Kapeni and his colleagues were thus not so well-armed and destructive as the leaders of the other Yao divisions at the south end of the lake, and were also not such active traders in slaves. Again, in contrast with the other Yao branches, they were desirous of seeking the assistance of the whites against the devastating raids of the Maseko Ngoni. They therefore responded eagerly to the overtures of the missionaries regarding them as potential allies in the defence of their villages.<sup>16</sup> The Kololo, too, welcomed the Blantyre missionaries partly because of their previous association with David Livingstone and partly because they had become worried about the threat of Ngoni incursions across the Shire which they had been unable to prevent.<sup>17</sup> Many refugees - both Nyanja and Mangoce Yao - together with a smaller group of Kololo pupils settled in villages under mission protection round Blantyre. But Blantyre's successes were not to be easily achieved. Between 1879 and 1881 the mission staff were involved in a serious scandal of mismanagement and harsh and inhuman maintenance of criminal justice in their freed slave villages. After a commission of inquiry, the missionaries were recalled or dismissed, Blantyre Mission having to be practically refounded.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Duff Macdonald, *op. cit.*, 2, pp.22-5.

17. E.D. Young, *Nyassa* (London, 1877), p.174 et seq.; W.H. J. Rangeley, "The Makololo," *op. cit.*, p.91.

18. A.C. Ross, *The Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Mission Blantyre, Nyasaland 1875-1926*, Ph.D. Edinburgh, 1968, Chap.3.

Under the able guidance and charge of the Rev. Clement Scott, the work of the mission was reorganized and by the mid-1880s it had begun to extend its evangelical and educational influence. Unlike the Livingstonia Mission, the Blantyre Mission pursued a basically residential system only setting up a few village schools around its stations. During the pre-imperial period, therefore, the impact of the mission was confined to the places where stations were founded and no schools were introduced in areas outside of the vicinity of Blantyre or the out-stations of Chiradzulu, Domasi and Mlanje. The impact of the Blantyre Mission was further restricted by the lack of finance which handicapped it for much of the pioneer period and which prevented the opening of other stations until the mid-1890s. But even these new stations continued to be confined to the Shire Highlands and parts of the Ncheu district. Like Livingstonia, the Blantyre Mission failed to make any effective headway in the Upper Shire district and also never penetrated the lower Shire Valley. Even though these two latter areas were not ignored by other missionary societies, they nevertheless remained little influenced by Christianity. The peoples in these areas were therefore unable to break out of the old traditions which was so necessary for the development of modern African politics. In the Shire Highlands, however, Blantyre attracted many pupils from the 1880s and evangelical and educational activity made some advance. Elements of a primary education were provided and pupils were



introduced generally to the mores and folkways of the western world.<sup>19</sup>

But missionary success was greatest in the northern region during the pre-imperial period. Tongaland proved to be an area far more conducive to the expansion of the influence of the Livingstonia missionaries than that at Cape Maclear. Not only were the missionaries not confronted with the challenges of the slave trade and Islam but also the lakeside Tonga enthusiastically welcomed the European newcomers hoping to involve them on their side against Mbelwa's Ngoni.<sup>20</sup> Yet no less receptive were the Ngoni to missionary overtures. An incipient decline in the northern Ngoni state, due in part to their not possessing firearms because they were not slave dealers and could not thus obtain guns from the Arabs, was causing considerable concern particularly at the mounting ability of neighbouring societies to repel their attacks. At the same time, internal dissensions between Mbelwa and his brothers who were important segment leaders were also becoming serious. Because Mbelwa's kingdom was the largest of the Ngoni states, it contained several important territorial sections which were powerful enough to insist on a measure of autonomy and which were continually challenging the power of the paramount chief.<sup>21</sup> Faced with these problems, Mbelwa, from 1882, attracted

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19. *ibid.*, Chaps.2 and 4.

20. J. van Velsen, "The Missionary Factor among the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland," The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal, 26 (1959), pp.1-22.

21. Margaret Read, op. cit., p.80.

the Livingstonia missionaries to northern Ngoniland, partly to prevent an exclusive alliance developing between the Tonga and the whites, and partly to get the Europeans to act as an integrating force within a splintering Ngoni polity.<sup>22</sup> By 1887, Free Church missionaries were teaching and preaching throughout the state.

When Dr. Robert Laws led the Livingstonia missionaries to Bandawe in 1881, he immediately opened schools and the Tonga responded enthusiastically to the education offered. Tonga cultural emphasis upon individual achievement which affected rank status,<sup>23</sup> made them look upon education as a vital weapon in the effort either to conserve or to improve status. By the early 1890s, nearly two thousand pupils were regularly attending school and more than a dozen schools were operating throughout Tongaland. Laws attempted to spread elementary education over as wide an area as possible rather than concentrating on boarding schools at the main station. Subjects were taught in the vernacular and the highest available class was Standard Four. Complementing academic work was industrial training; Laws hoped that by learning reading and writing with some instruction in the crafts his pupils would be of use in the infant European commercial economy in the Shire Highlands. And, indeed, unable to satisfy their demand for European manufactured goods (which the mission had created) by finding employment in

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22. For a discussion of Mbelwa's manoeuvres, see K.J. McCracken, *op. cit.*, Chap.4.

23. See J. van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship (Manchester, 1964).



their homeland, the Tonga soon began making their way in large numbers to the southern highlands of Malawi and later to neighbouring countries in search of work and cash. In northern Ngoniland, too, schools were started though a few years later than among the Tonga. Although attendance was at first small and irregular, with pupils coming mainly from Ngoni captives, the numbers slowly increased drawing in time upon members of the royal Jere clan. As with the Tonga, consequent upon the lack of economic opportunities at home, the Ngoni began migrating to other areas in Malawi or abroad in search of employment to buy the goods they so eagerly desired.<sup>24</sup> All this was to be of significance for the subsequent development of African political activity. The lead taken in the field of education by the Tonga, northern Ngoni and the indigenous Tumbuka was to be reflected in the field of modern African politics. Throughout the colonial era, mission-educated Africans from these groups were to be not only the first but also the most politically-active persons in Nyasaland. And to their political deliberations they could bring that wider knowledge of events and ideas derived from their experiences elsewhere in the Protectorate or abroad.

Backed by superior financial resources than Blantyre, the Livingstonia Mission introduced further small stations under European control. A station was founded at Karonga in Nkhonde country. But the religious

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24. J. van Velsen (The Missionary Factor), op. cit.,

position of the Nkhonde paramount, the Kyungu, who through his spiritual authority embodied the unity and solidarity of the tribe, proved a major barrier to success. By propagating Christianity against the traditional religion, the missionaries were striking at the unity of the tribe and were consequently unable, for some years, to make effective inroads into Nkhonde society.<sup>25</sup> Success also eluded Livingstonia in southern Ngoniland where a station was started in 1887 some distance from the paramount's headquarters in the Livulezi Valley in predominantly Cewa country. On their settlement in Malawi, the Maseko Ngoni were divided between two chiefs, Chikusi and Chifusi, who were continually warring on each other. It was not surprising therefore that when Chikusi asked the missionaries for assistance and this was refused, relations between the two sides should become strained. Among the northern Ngoni, Laws had been able to exploit the internal dissensions in a segmentary state but owing to the unitary nature of the southern kingdom and the absolute power of the paramount Chikusi, especially after the defeat and defection of Chifusi, missionary chances for influence were considerably narrowed. Refusal to side with the eventual victorious chief, the absence of any segmentary tendencies within the Ngoni state, and the geographical remoteness of the mission station, all conspired to limit the import of the Free Church on the Maseko Ngoni before the advent of British rule.<sup>26</sup>

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25. K.J. McCracken, op. cit., Chap.4.

26. ibid.,



David Livingstone had advocated the conjunction of economic progress and spiritual advancement for the redemption of Africa. If the slave trade was to be undermined, much depended on the ability of the missionaries to promote the introduction of legitimate commerce. But Livingstonia's trading activities at Cape Maclear proved cumbersome and time-consuming and the missionaries soon began to see the need for a trading organization which would take over the responsibility of ordering, transporting and distributing the commodities that they required to carry on operations. The Free Church in Scotland therefore decided on the formation of a trading company, independent of Livingstonia, the object of which was to supply both Scottish missions and to establish commerce on a substantial level to oust the slave trade.

The African Lakes Company (A.L.C.) hoped to buy up ivory, the main local article of economic value, and to export it at a price which would undercut the Arab coastal merchants relying on slave porters. It hoped, thereby, to induce the Yao to abandon securing slaves and concentrate instead on the procurement of ivory for sale to the A.L.C. But the Company found it difficult to acquire ivory. The prices demanded by Yao traders were far too high. Yet the Company was not a complete failure. Gradually, it began to procure ivory either by trading with such peoples as the Kololo, Nyanja, northern Ngoni and the northern Arabs or by sending its staff out on hunting trips. Great efforts were also made to encourage the cultivation of crops which would provide an export

trade and plantations were started in the Shire Highlands. The Company's carrying trade also became a major part of its operations especially with the spread of mission stations. A thirty-ton steamer was launched in 1887 for the lower Shire-Zambezi run and water traffic was increasing. A large employer of labour, particularly porters, the Lakes Company consequently dispensed much calico and trade goods to the local peoples with whom, apart from a few notorious incidents, it maintained friendly relations. But apart from the activities of the A.L.C., white planting and trading interests in the Malawi region were still slight and few Europeans had settled in the country before the onset of colonial rule. The end of 1887 saw the outbreak of the Arab War in which the Lakes Company became deeply involved. Compelled to carry on the long drawn-out war alone and unaided, there resulted a serious interruption in all of its schemes of development, including the normal trading of the Company, and which brought it to the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>27</sup>

#### The assumption of British political control

Unless the slave trade was brought to an end, both

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27. This paragraph is based mainly on an unpublished seminar paper delivered at Chancellor College, University of Malawi by H.W. Macmillan entitled "A Sketch for the History of the African Lakes Company 1878-93," (November 11, 1968.).



commercial and evangelical activity and internal order were impossible. From their earliest days in the country, the missionaries had pressed the British Government to appoint a commissioner with the backing of a steamer on the lake and a small armed force to counteract the traffic in slaves. Both missionaries and the Lakes Company, together with their supporters in Scotland, seem to have acted as a united pressure group and campaigned the home government to safeguard British interests in the Malawi region. Probably as a result of such concerted pressure, a consul was appointed in 1883 to "suppress" the slave trade though he was instructed to rely on persuasion and tact and not armed force to achieve his end. Despite his obvious impotence, the British Government continued to turn a deaf ear to demands to extend its commitments in the Lake Malawi region. With the outbreak of the Arab War, however, appeals for greater British involvement were considerably strengthened.<sup>28</sup>

No attempt can be made here to discuss the causes and progress of the Arab War which lasted from late 1887 to October 1890.<sup>29</sup> Suffice it is to say that within a few years of the A.L.C. starting a trading post at Karonga in 1884, a group of half-caste Arabs, attracted by the

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28. A.J. Hanna, The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia 1859-95 (Oxford, 1956), pp.55-79.

29. ibid., pp.79-83, 88-9, 92-105, 151-5; L.M. Fotheringham, Adventures in Nyasaland (London, 1891).

market for their ivory, began to settle around the station and soon commenced violently to assert their ascendancy over the local Nkhonde. On the Company agents granting sanctuary to the fleeing Nkhonde refugees and on their aiding Nkhonde villagers, the Arabs became agitated towards the whites and determined to oust them from Karonga. The resultant fighting dragged on with neither side being powerful enough to bring the struggle to a successful conclusion, the situation becoming a stalemate.

Combined pressure from the supporters of the Company and the missions continued to be applied for British protection, but the government insisted that it could do nothing to help. 1888 saw the demand for British involvement intensify with the growing attempts by the Portuguese in the south to make good their historic claims to Malawi by dispatching expeditions to the southern end of the lake to persuade the Yao to place themselves under Portuguese protection. From the time of Livingstone's explorations, the Portuguese, settled along the East coast and lower Zambezi since the late fifteenth century, had become concerned about British intentions in interior districts which they regarded as lying within their 'sphere of influence'. From about 1886, the Portuguese began to send an increasing number of missions to the Lake Malawi area to strengthen their claims. Local Portuguese authorities in Mozambique also began interfering with British vessels plying the Zambezi and even refusing the passage of certain equipment to Malawi. In



May 1888, the Lakes Company was refused permission to import guns and ammunition for use in the Arab War and only after vigorous British diplomatic representations were the goods allowed to proceed.<sup>30</sup>

Growing more alarmed at the simultaneous threat of the Arabs in the north and the Portuguese in the south, Britons in Malawi began clamouring more vigorously for British political control. The British Foreign Office, however, evinced no desire to take up administrative responsibility. It was reluctant not only to assume any additional financial burdens but also to annex territories to which access could only be obtained through undisputed Portuguese country. No navigable passage to the Zambezi was known and vessels had to enter the river from Quelimane and the Kwakwa mouth which became unnavigable about forty miles from the coast. From this stage, an overland journey of four miles through Portuguese territory was necessary to reach the mainstream.

With rumours reaching Britain of a massive missao civilisadora, led by the renowned explorer Serpa Pinto, advancing to the Malawi region ostensibly for scientific purposes but actually to establish Portuguese sovereignty over the Shire districts, great consternation was caused in Scotland among mission and Company supporters. When the British Government sent a consul Harry Johnston to Lisbon in early 1889 to come to an understanding with the Portuguese about Malawi, and he returned with a draft

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30. A.J. Hanna, op. cit., pp.127-8, 131-2; Eric Axelson, Portugal and the Scramble for Africa (Johannesburg, 1967).

agreement which would have ceded the whole of the Shire Highlands and the southern half of the lake area to Portugal, "the Voice of Scotland" was raised to a roar. Such was the agitation stirred up by the established Church that no more was heard of Johnston's delimitation scheme. More important, however, the British Government had been made abundantly aware of Scottish insistence that Portugal not be permitted to enter into the land of the Blantyre mission.<sup>31</sup>

In March 1889 Cecil Rhodes had arrived in England to conclude negotiations for a royal charter for his South Africa Company which would empower it to administer territory it had acquired extending from Botswana in the south to the Zambezi in the north. Harry Johnston and Rhodes met at a party in May at which they exchanged their visions of British enterprise in Africa and concluded that territory north of the Zambezi including the Malawi region should be secured for Britain. Acknowledging Britain's financial inability to take over this area, Rhodes offered to pay for the police and administration of northern Zambezia, hoping, no doubt, that he would eventually obtain control of territory both north and south of the Zambezi. No longer deterred by lack of finance, the Foreign Office now accepted the desirability of keeping Portugal out of the Shire Highlands though it decided to pay Johnston's travelling expenses in the Malawi region while Rhodes' money could look after

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<sup>31</sup>. A.J. Hanna, op. cit., pp.132-8; Roland Oliver, Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa (London, 1959), pp.144-151.



anything else including the presents for chiefs elsewhere in northern Zambezia. Moreover, the other major obstacle to British sovereignty in the area - access to the lake region - had also been overcome. In May 1889, a deep-water outlet of the Zambezi had been discovered at Chinde whereby steamers could proceed directly to the Shire and the lake without encroaching upon Portuguese soil.<sup>32</sup>

Arriving at the Ruo confluence in July 1889, Johnston came across the large expedition under Serpa Pinto whose mere size belied the scientific purposes attributed to it. Pinto was being held up by the Kololo chiefs of the Shire Valley and Johnston warned him that if force was used to advance through Kololo country, Anglo-Portuguese relations might be seriously affected. Continuing his treaty-making journey up the Shire to forestall his rival, Johnston authorized acting-consul John Buchanan to declare a British protectorate if the Portuguese crossed the Ruo frontier in force and gave any evidence of an intention to occupy the Shire Highlands politically. Johnston then proceeded to sign treaties with various Kololo, Mangoch Yao and Tonga chiefs, and with the Jumbe of Nkhota-Khota which, though they did not confer or promise protection, ensured the priority of British interests in the regions to which they applied.

Kololo acceptance of these 'friendship' treaties was based on the assumption that their essential interests could be better preserved under British than Portuguese

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<sup>32</sup>. A.J. Hanna, op. cit., pp.138-142; Roland Oliver, op. cit., pp.152-6.

influence. Certainly they do not appear to have entertained any ideas of ceding their sovereign rights to the Europeans. As for the other African groups that signed the 1889 treaties, they seem to have done so mainly because they were threatened by more powerful neighbours. The readiness with which raided chiefs made treaties was clearly related to their weak position and their hope of support against the Ngoni or Yao. The Jumbe seems to have been in this position in 1889. Although the Jumbe had at one time been a foremost trader in slaves, he now seems to have become mainly a dealer in ivory, also finding it more profitable to keep his slaves on the land to grow rice for sale to passing caravans. The major reason for his signing a treaty with Johnston appears to have lain in the fact that one of his Yao sub-chiefs, Ciwaura, had increased his power and allied himself with Makanjila, the most important Yao slaver along the southern half of the lake. Jumbe may therefore have been looking to the British for support against possible external and internal threats. Apart from these treaties, a truce was also concluded at Karonga between the Arab leaders and the representatives of the Lakes Company. Both sides were utterly exhausted and at the end of their resources and keen to bring reprisals to an end. The treaty evoked hardly any concessions from either side but it was sufficient to restore peace for a few years at least. No treaties were signed with the northern Ngoni leaders although one of Johnston's temporary vice-consuls, Alfred Sharpe, concluded agreements with chiefs Chikusi and Ciwere





in the central region.

In mid-December whilst nearing Lake Mweru in northern Zambia, news reached Johnston that following a skirmish between the Kololo and the Portuguese at the Ruo frontier in September, Buchanan had on the 21st of that month proclaimed a formal protectorate over the Kololo and Yao districts. In November the Portuguese had crossed the Ruo and been engaged by the Kololo in battle. The Kololo had been repulsed with severe losses and the Portuguese had then occupied Katunga's (near Chikwawa) giving notice of their intention to take over the Shire Highlands. But the question of the definition of spheres was under discussion between Britain and Portugal. In the end, the British Foreign Office dispatched a series of telegrams which culminated on January 11, 1890 in a formal ultimatum to the Portuguese Government in Lisbon requiring the withdrawal of their forces to the south of the Ruo confluence or British gunboats would shell the capital of Mozambique. Portugal submitted, and the armed expedition was compelled to retreat below the Ruo, respecting that river as the limit of Portuguese territory in the region.<sup>33</sup>

The frontiers of the new colonial state of Malawi were soon delineated and the basis of a settlement for its administration gradually worked out. Agreement was hammered out between the British South Africa Company of Cecil Rhodes and the Foreign Office whereby Malawi was separated from the rest of northern Zambezia, annexed and administered directly by the Imperial government, with

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33. Roland Oliver, op. cit., pp.157-172.

Rhodes obtaining title to what became Zambia. Harry Johnston was entrusted with supreme political control even over the Company's northern sphere and was provided with a sum of £10,000 per annum by Rhodes' Company to administer both the territories. Johnston, however, was to remain responsible only to the Foreign Office. The agreement was to last for three years up to January 1, 1894 subject to renewal at the discretion of the British Government for a further period not exceeding two years. The Foreign Office thus found itself in a position to govern Malawi without seeking Treasury financial backing and the B.S.A. Company's charter was extended north of the Zambezi. On February 14, 1891, Harry Johnston was given his formal appointment "to be Her Majesty's Commissioner and Consul-General to the territories under British influence to the north of the Zambezi." On May 14, 1891, a British Protectorate was formally proclaimed over Malawi.<sup>34</sup> British administration had come to Malawi in name though it would still be a number of years before it was present in actuality.

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34. The Protectorate was designated initially as the British Central Africa Protectorate and as the Nyasaland Protectorate from 1907.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Indigenous Politics, Colonial Administration and the Rise of Modern African Politics, 1891-1914.

For five years after Harry Johnston had assumed charge of the new Protectorate in July 1891, British administration was confined to a narrow strip of territory extending from the southern Portuguese frontier to the northern extent of the Shire Highlands. On the lake and beyond it, no attempt was made to govern, primarily because of the paucity of financial and military means, though two ex-employees of the African Lakes Company exercised duties of a consular nature. In the Upper Shire district between Zomba, the Protectorate's capital, and the southern lakeshore, attempts to impose immediate British political control were met with stiff resistance by a number of Yao slaving chiefs. With their eventual defeat in 1896, and with the colonial regime now possessing a larger financial and military backing, the rest of the country was brought speedily under British rule, though the northern Ngoni only voluntarily accepted colonial sovereignty in 1904. In the history of East and Central Africa, Malawi was brought under European control with a speed exceptional for the period. Nevertheless, the imposition of British authority was, for the most part, a halting and piecemeal process, compounded of numerous petty, though violent, incidents. During the years of assertion of British supremacy, the colonial government had also begun fashioning a system of local administration.

In attempting to establish a sound system of civil administration, it soon became clear to Johnston and his successors that it was not possible to govern effectively unless use was made of those elements whose authority was recognized in traditional terms by its ordinary populace as legitimate. But the numerous 'little' wars waged by Johnston had resulted in the destruction of the political forms of the larger Yao and Ngoni chiefdoms, which were the only substantial indigenous polities in the Protectorate. This destruction of the power of the larger chiefdoms, when combined with the existing political fragmentation of the rest of the Protectorate, had important consequences for African political developments. Not only was the adoption of a policy of indirect rule through chiefs not very successful but the traditional authorities were also unsuited for dealing with the new challenges of colonialism. Meanwhile, a new African elite was emerging which began to assert its claims to represent the feelings and aspirations of the African peoples and which began to seek to supersede the chiefs as the more efficient intermediaries between Africans and Europeans. These new educated elements were the originators of modern secular African political activity and provided the beginnings for an eventual African challenge to colonial tutelage itself.

#### African political systems and the introduction of colonial rule

Soon after his arrival as Commissioner and Consul-



General, Harry Johnston set about negotiating treaties with the African chiefs whereby the Crown acquired sovereign political authority of their areas in place of its far more limited rights under the earlier contracts which had made it the protecting power. He began by securing a cession of sovereign rights from the chiefs of southern Malawi. The leaders of the Nyanja, Manganja, Kololo and Mangoce Yao peoples as well as those of the other essentially agricultural societies that Johnston later contacted in other parts of the Protectorate, such as the Cewa, Tonga and Nkhonde, all acquiesced in British overlordship. Their previous contacts and relations with Europeans, mainly missionaries, must have guided them in their response to the white newcomers and led them to believe that their vital interests would not be undermined by the advent of the new British power which could, above all, promise them protection and peace which would be such an advance upon their former conditions of life. It might have been expected that the Kololo would have regarded white control as a threat to their dominant position over the Manganja. But their engagements with the Portuguese in 1889 had left them badly beaten and by being forced to flee to the Europeans in Blantyre for help had, accordingly, suffered a profound blow to their authority. For assertions of African hostility to the new invaders, it remained for the Macinga and Masaniga Yao slavers of the Upper Shire region to come into collision with the new challenges of European power and for them alone, of all the peoples of the southern region, to offer resistance to the British take-over.

Johnston claimed that his first major object was to safeguard the security of the Shire Highlands, where white planting and missionary concerns were becoming important, and also maintain the lines of communication northwards along the lake to secure missionary and trading interests in that area. The need to exercise control over the Upper Shire district brought the British into immediate conflict with the recalcitrant Yao slavers and especially with Makanjila who was the leading slaving power along the southern half of the lake. Yet despite his willingness to confront the Yao, Johnston was in no position to effectively subdue them. No other British administration in tropical Africa started out with such a slender military and financial base. Johnston's army was composed of a mere seventy-one Indian soldiers supported by a similar number of ill-trained Zanzibari and Makua auxiliaries. Its deployment was to be a matter of constant anxiety. Should it be overpowered, as it easily might be in a single ambush, no further military support could be expected. If the powers to subdue were not at hand, the means of persuasion by way of handsome subsidies were also lacking. Johnston's financial backing amounted only to the annual subsidy of £10,000 - an income which to many of his contemporaries would have appeared equivalent to the rent-roll of a second-rate English landowner. Because of these weaknesses in men and money, Johnston was obliged to pursue a policy of extending his authority through agreement with weak African polities and resorting to what Dr. E. Stokes has termed a "spoiling policy of



weakening, dividing and wearing down every indigenous political system that possessed any capacity to menace or resist." <sup>1</sup>

Rivalry among and within the various Yao chiefdoms made Johnston's methods for extending political control seem the obvious tactics. The more substantial Yao chiefdoms, which had begun to develop in size consequent upon the growth of the slave trade, still lacked internal cohesion. Composed as they were in large part of indigenous Nyanja, internal divisions could be exploited along ethnic lines as well as by the support of one group within a chiefdom against its competitors. And because the Yao chiefdoms were also riven by disunity among themselves, one Yao chief could be played off against another. Between 1891 and 1895, Johnston waged a series of small wars against the Yao chiefs of the Upper Shire region before they eventually yielded and accepted British rule. These numerous 'little' wars together with Johnston's various divisive tactics resulted in the power of the Yao chiefs being broken and their political systems being permanently weakened. Whatever larger political forms the Yao slavers had managed to develop were now completely destroyed. With the defeat of the Yao, Johnston, now possessing a stronger military backing, turned his attention to the subjugation of the north-end Arabs. Mlozi and his allies were quickly overwhelmed and Arab power at

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1. Eric Stokes, "Malawi Political Systems and the Introduction of Colonial Rule 1891-1896," in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, eds., The Zambesian Past (Manchester, 1966), p.360.

last obliterated and reduced to insignificance.<sup>2</sup>

Before launching his operations against Mlozi, Johnston had ensured the beginnings of British administration at Nkhota-Khota. Information had reached Zomba in early 1894 of a revival in slave trading activity which the ageing Jumbe was powerless to prevent. Divisions within the sultanate had rendered it a splintering polity with Jumbe supporting the Cewa headmen and concerning himself more with agriculture than trade, and the Arab and Yao elements continuing to deal with slaves. In July 1894, Jumbe 111 died and his successor, the son of a slave wife of Jumbe 1 and a supporter of the Yao, had soon to be deposed and deported to Zanzibar for having local notabilities murdered; for planning to kill all the Cewa headmen of the old Jumbe; and for seeking to destroy a British station near Nkhota-Khota.<sup>3</sup> No Jumbe was now appointed. Instead, the district was placed under the general supervision of a British Resident who began administering through a council of native rulers. The indigenous Cewa chiefs and headmen of the eight territorial sub-districts accepted British sovereignty, agreed to desist from the slave trade and agreed to

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2. For details of the various military campaigns, see H. Moyse-Bartlett, The King's African Rifles (Aldershot, 1956), pp.19-22, and for a discussion of British success in imposing control over the Yao slavers, see Lewis Gann, "The End of the Slave Trade in British Central Africa: 1889-1912," The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal, 16 (1954), pp.46-7.

3. F.O.2/68, Sharpe to F.O., 5 December 1894; F.O.2/88, Sharpe to F.O., 15 January 1895, P.R.O., London.



conform to the laws and regulations of the new administration. Following Mlozi's defeat, the rest of the central region, consisting of a jumble of Cewa, Yao and semi-Ngoni groups, was quickly brought under British occupation and control. The indigenous Cewa presented no problem though a few who had developed contacts with the Yao offered brief and piecemeal resistance. The larger Cewa and Yao chiefdoms were defeated and broken up and the central region, like the southern one, came to be characterized by a high degree of political fragmentation.

Only the two major Ngoni states still remained to be brought under direct administration. Mbelwa's Ngoni was able to avoid direct confrontation with the British. The remoteness of northern Ngoniland from the sources of economic power in the south made it less necessary for Johnston to assume control than was to be the case with southern Ngoniland. The northern Ngoni were not an important source of labour for the southern white estates. At the same time, missionary provision of education and industrial training had already led to the young men transforming themselves from warriors into migrant labourers. Finally, the segmentary character of the northern kingdom not only prevented the creation of a concerted effort to withstand white advance but laid open the state to the views of the younger elements who were advocating collaboration with the new European forces. Eventually, in 1904, the northern Ngoni voluntarily placed themselves under British jurisdiction, thus ensuring that their political system remained substantially intact. For

the Maseko Ngoni, however, proximity to the Shire Highlands and the lack of missionary counsel and influence, were factors making collision with the British more likely. Moreover, the southern Ngoni state, during the 1890s, was coming apart at the ethnic seams. Cewa labour migrants were acquiring increased status through their earnings when they returned home and there were fears that the authority of Ngoni chiefs might be diminished by the growing independence of the Cewa populace. The Ngoni rulers thus felt it necessary to reassert their control. When the Ngoni exerted pressure on the Cewa to remain at home rather than go to work on white estates, this threatened the drying up of the planter's labour supply which the government could not ignore. When a series of raids were made against Cewa villages and a mission station, which had granted refuge to Cewa fugitives, attacked by an Ngoni party, the British had sufficient inducement to dispatch an expeditionary force. The Ngoni paramount's village was attacked and his army defeated. Chief Gomani, the paramount, was taken prisoner and shot for murder. His villages were fired, his cattle seized and his power broken.<sup>4</sup>

Johnston's military expeditions led to the "dismantling of the larger-scale systems and the displacement

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4. J.K. Rennie, "The Ngoni States and European Intrusion," in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 312-331. See also *The Central African Times*, 24 December 1904, p. 13 for an interesting article entitled "The Gomani Raid" by H.J.R. - H.J. Rutherford, editor of the newspaper.



of the political and coercive authority of centralized institutions and paramounts."<sup>5</sup> This was mainly the case with the Yao and Ngoni states in the central and southern regions. The northern Ngoni were not subdued and their political order was left substantially intact though existing segmentary tendencies within Ngoni society were leading to a decline in the power of the paramount vis-a-vis his sectional chiefs. Elsewhere in the infant Protectorate, however, Johnston's military campaigns reduced the power of the larger pre-colonial polities which together with the existing political fragmentation meant that the traditional political authorities were not to be of any great strength and substance during the colonial period. More importantly, the old political systems were to prove themselves generally unsuited for dealing with the new challenges of colonialism.

#### African societies, traditional institutions and the new colonial order

The period of occupation was ended. Primary African resistance had been a vain and futile attempt to recapture the past and from it Africans derived many important lessons for the future. They must clearly have realized that if they were to challenge white authority or even try to regain their independence, then different and essentially non-violent means were required. Armed resistance had proved ineffective and had exposed the great technological inferiority of African societies. Professor J.C. Mitchell has written that the "superior arms of the British left an indelible impression on the

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5. E. Stokes, op. cit., p.372.

Yao who had long conducted successful military campaigns and in due course these arms came to be identified with the force of the value system of the Whites."<sup>6</sup> Such an impression must also have been shared by all the African peoples of Nyasaland. As well, they must have realized the need for organizing a unified African reaction to the colonial authority. Piecemeal African resistance had proved a serious drawback and a wider and popular movement was essential if opposition to the colonial regime was to be more successful. But many years were to pass before a mass nationalist movement was created.

For the resisting groups, there must have been, for the future, a continuing significance of memories of defeat. Professor Margaret Read tells us that in the 1930s the southern Ngoni "referred repeatedly to the expeditions sent against them, the defeat of their army, the death of their paramount and the seizure of their cattle. They nursed a grudge against their conqueror which coloured much of their sentiments towards Europeans."<sup>7</sup> A similar and probably more traumatic experience must also have been felt by the Yao of the Upper Shire district. But the political significance of memories of defeated resistance is difficult to explain in the Malawi context.<sup>8</sup> It may well be that their

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6. J. Clyde Mitchell, "The Political Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland," African Studies, 8,3 (1949), p.145.

7. M. Read, The Ngoni of Nyasaland (London, 1956), p.43.

8. For a general discussion of this subject in East and Central Africa, see T.O. Ranger, "Connexions between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa," Journal of African History, 9,3 (1968), pp.437-53 and 9,4 (1968), pp.631-41.



importance was confined solely to the existence of some lingering feelings of bitterness and resentment against Europeans rather than their seeking expression in direct political action against the colonial order. This is probable in Malawi because neither of the two groups suffered any serious disadvantages or disabilities as a result of being defeated. The dispossession of defeated Africans by the British was not of any great significance in Malawi. Unlike the Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia, neither Gomani's Ngoni nor the Yao lost their land except for the occasional site for a mission, trading or government station. Again, unlike the Ndebele, the southern Ngoni suffered no similarly large and debilitating expropriation of their cattle to their white overlords. Of equal moment was the fact that the accommodating societies gained no striking advantage over the vanquished. None of the collaborating peoples were rewarded with increased territory at the expense of their defeated neighbours. Nor were the Nyanja, Cewa or Tonga, unlike the Ganda in Uganda, used by the British as government agents in other tribal areas. Thus, even where an African group in Malawi had done badly out of the initial encounter with the British, it was still able to confront the new colonial situation on a par with the non-resisting ones, and, if it so wished, gain equal access and opportunity to the new sources of prestige and advantage like western education and economic development. The Yao, for instance, although continuing to reject Christianity, were able to compensate for the loss of

their slave trade by marketing their surplus produce for sale to the increasing number of persons of all races who were beginning to settle in the Shire Highlands. And the southern Ngoni soon started sending their youth to the local mission schools and their able-bodied males began moving in large numbers either to the Shire Highlands or to neighbouring countries in search of work and cash. The fact that even for the defeated there were advantages to be derived from the new colonial order softened the blow of military defeat and ensured that few profound feelings of bitterness were retained during the colonial period.

Eventually, no doubt, all African societies suffered a blow through the loss of sovereignty as the British rulers progressively established the effectiveness of their rule. Very few of the African leaders could have desired that political control of their lands be alienated permanently to the Europeans. Although they could not have been aware of all the implications of the treaties they signed they must have realized their significance to a certain extent. Yet they could not have realized what the nature of European rule would be, how it would affect their societies and how long it would remain. And, indeed, African life was never to be the same again. During the first years of colonial rule, however, British occupation and the other western forces impinged only slightly on the lives of most Africans in the Protectorate. Partly for this reason, there was no further traditionalist type of African resistance to European control as occurred elsewhere in East and Central Africa. Disillusion



with white rule was certainly not absent, particularly in the Shire Highlands and parts of the central region, but it did not lead to any widespread resistance movement beyond a few small riots. It is important to discuss why subsequent rebellions of a traditional type did not break out in Malawi in order to enable us to shed light not only on the nature of the early colonial impact on the African peoples but on the suitability of tribal institutions for dealing with the new challenges of colonialism.

By and large, during the 1890s, administrative and settler pressures in Malawi were not as intensive and harsh as those experienced by Africans in neighbouring countries and where the indigenous peoples were impelled into further resistance. In Matabeleland, the element of settler participation and the expansion of the energies of South Africa were of considerable importance.<sup>9</sup> White enterprise in Malawi, confined almost entirely to the Shire Highlands, was a slower and more exiguous affair. In Southern Rhodesia the pressure of hundreds of white settlers together with the demands of the British South Africa Company itself compared significantly with the much smaller number of planters in Malawi who arrived in smaller batches over a longer period of time. The demands of the Protectorate administration were probably more onerous but there were no exactions as profoundly serious

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9 . T.O. Ranger, Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7 (London, 1967), Chaps.2-3.

as those attendant upon the government-enforced schemes of cotton-growing in German East Africa which were the major causes of the outbreak of the Maji-Maji rebellion.<sup>10</sup> Johnston's administration cared little about African agriculture and took no actions that would threaten seriously African subsistence economies. Outside the Shire Highlands, where white settlement was also of little consequence, the colonial government, consequent upon limited men and money, exercised a very frail authority. Northern Ngoniland remained independent until 1904 while elsewhere a few white officers faced thousands of Africans who continued to live much as before.

Be that as it may, governmental pressures allied with settler demands did create considerable dissatisfaction from the mid-1890s and, in many ways, the causes for further rebellion may well have existed, particularly in the Shire Highlands and some of the neighbouring districts in the central region. For it was in these areas that the white planters established themselves and where the colonial government exercised its greatest control. Settler intrusion with its usual consequences of land alienation and labour recruitment was beginning to turn the Shire Highlands into a microcosm of Southern Rhodesia and also leading to the creation of a series of grievances for local and neighbouring Africans which sometimes produced violent outbursts. Ill-treatment of

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10. John Iliffe, "The organization of the Maji Maji rebellion," Journal of African History, 8,3 (1967), pp. 495-512.



labourers on white plantations and the loss of African land rights were a major source of discontent. The unsavoury methods of labour recruiters were another and were held to be the chief reason for the outbreak of a brief rising among the southern Ngoni at Domwe in 1898.<sup>11</sup> In another district, also important for the provision of labour for southern white estates, Central Ngoniland, there were frequent disturbances which culminated in serious disorder in 1901 and led to an official enquiry being conducted.<sup>12</sup> Labour recruiters were again condemned but the real causes went deeper. Africans possessed few local opportunities to earn cash to defray their tax obligations to the government and were unwilling to migrate to the Shire Highlands and work on white estates where conditions were bad and discipline harsh. But a tax defaulter was liable to be conscripted for labour on white plantations until he had earned the amount of his tax. The imposition of the government's hut tax at an earlier date in the central and southern regions than in the north, coupled with its more rigorous collection, was proving a burden for many Africans and discontent increased as Africans were forced to obtain employment away from home to work off their tax requirements.<sup>13</sup>

But the possibilities for organization are also of importance in the creation of any rebellion. The Maji-Maji

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11. British Central Africa Gazette (B.C.A.G.), 30 April 1898, p.1; 11 June 1898, p.2.

12. F.O.2/472, Sharpe to F.O., 31 December 1901, P.R.O., London. See also M.W. Retief, William Murray of Nyasaland (Lovedale, 1958), p.67.

13. For a more detailed discussion of these and other pressures on Africans, see Chap.3.

rebellion in German East Africa and the 1896-97 rebellions in Southern Rhodesia had been quite different from the early African resistances to European occupation. Whereas primary resistance had been tribally based and fought in terms of the traditional military system, the subsequent rebellions were mass movements integrating diverse peoples which involved everyone in the rebel areas. The achievement of such unity on a larger scale had been brought about by a traditional religious ideology.<sup>14</sup> Primary resistance in Malawi had also utilized independently existing forms of military organization and there had been no unified reaction on the part of the indigenous peoples to the British invasion. But as a result of the series of 'little' wars fought by Johnston, the larger political systems of the southern Ngoni and the Yao had been broken up thus rendering them incapable of organizing any further resistance on a significant level. As well, the existing fragmented political structure of the Cewa, Nyanja and Mangoch Yao prevented their political authorities from promoting effective resistance. The means for further resistance also did not exist when African religious institutions proved unable to act as a focus for more wide and effective opposition to white authority.

The most important territorial spirit in nineteenth

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14. John Iliffe, op. cit.; Terence Ranger, "The Role of Ndebele and Shona Religious Authorities in the Rebellions of 1896 and 1897," in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, eds., The Zambesian Past, op. cit., pp.94-136.



century southern Malawi had been M'Bona which was attributed power with respect to the population and the land and which was the guardian spirit of the Manganja. The cult had been controlled by the royal house of Lundu and only the chief or his deputy had been able to perform rites, imposters or invading chiefs not being able to do so since they were not related to the tutelary spirit. Chief Lundu had maintained a shrine of M'Bona on Cholo mountain. The spirit of M'Bona was supposed to have an abode on the top of the mountain and to him the Lundu resorted for counsel in times of difficulty and danger. With the advent of the Kololo in the 1860s, Lundu and his family fled south into Portuguese territory and only returned to Nyasaland in 1927. M'Bona's worship on Cholo mountain began to die out and is only vaguely remembered to-day. Another shrine of M'Bona was to be found in the Port Herald (now Nsanje) district at the southern extreme of Malawi but this was mainly of local importance. The northern cult had therefore been of greater political significance but it had ceased to exist after the departure of Lundu and his family.<sup>15</sup> The other main rain institution in the Protectorate, the pan-Cewa rain-cult of Makewana in the central region, had also vanished completely under similar circumstances. Shortly after 1866, the cult centre was destroyed by the Ngoni, and Makewana and her

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15. J.M. Schoffoleers, M'Bona the Guardian-Spirit of the Mang'anja, B.Litt. Oxford, 1966.

court were dispersed or killed.<sup>16</sup> The territorial spirits of M'Bona and Makewana had therefore not outlived the pre-colonial era to be in a position to permit social mobilization on a wider scale than appeals by leaders of kin groups. Their importance, moreover, had not been influential among the Nyanja and Mangoch Yao of the Shire Highlands, and it was amongst these peoples that the constraints of the early administrative and planting systems were most onerous for Africans. In the Shire Highlands traditional religious authority was vested in those with kinship and political authority who, because of their fragmented nature, were unable to provide the basis for wider political action against the Europeans.

Yet a further traditional type of resistance to British control and white settler pressures was not altogether absent from the Malawi scene during the early colonial period. The hut tax, with its hated labour rebate which was introduced in 1901, was always a matter of African discontent particularly outside the Shire Highlands where few local opportunities existed for Africans to earn cash. In April 1907 a Chikunda prophetess, Chanjiri, appeared on the Mozambique/Southern Ngoniland border and preached that Europeans would leave the country by the end of the year and that no more taxes need be paid. Her appearance coincided with the explosion of a meteor in the area, and she claimed to have

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16. W.H.J. Rangeley, "Two Nyasaland Rain Shrines: Makewana - The Mother of all People," The Nyasaland Journal, 5,2 (1952), pp.48-9.



"miraculous powers" and to have "appeared from Heaven". Her teaching, reported the Deputy Governor, spread "like wild-fire through the whole Protectorate". This latter statement was a gross exaggeration but it was clear that the power of the prophetess was subject to the limits of neither kin nor territory.

"It appears that she issued an order to all natives that they must at once visit her to receive instructions from her, and that no one must come empty-handed. Natives of all tribes flocked in thousands to her, hundreds of natives employed by Europeans leaving their work to answer the summons. She promised excellent rains and ample harvests to all who came to do homage; she also announced that she would send darkness over that portion of the country where the white men live (Shire Highlands) and that no native need pay any more hut taxes, as the white man would disappear through her magic".

At first the government took the matter rather lightly until it discovered that the local tax returns showed a shortage of £3,000. Official concern mounted when it was learned that the prophetess had also become evident in Fort Johnston where several Yao chiefs, through passive resistance, had refused to collect taxes. The Portuguese authorities were asked to have the woman removed from the vicinity of the British frontier and she was warned about her future behaviour, and "the excitement among the natives...subsided".<sup>17</sup>

But the traditional institutions and systems were generally incapable of dealing with the challenges of the colonial situation. They had either been destroyed,

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17. C.O.525/18, F.B. Pearce to C.O., 31 August 1907, P.R.O., London.

disrupted or permanently weakened by the various conflicts of the nineteenth century and their capacity to tackle the problems of Africans in the new colonial state was very slight. New forms of political action were clearly needed which would provide a more effective challenge to white authority. Because of the early exposure to western education, the beginnings of modern African political activity followed quickly after the end of the period of traditionalist resistance. These new forms of political organization were to be non-tribal and to be led by 'new' men deploying new skills of opposition and aiming at full entry into the European styles of life rather than a return to the past. How modern African political action in Nyasaland began is our next concern

#### Traditional authorities and the rise of modern political organizations

During the years of assertion of British supremacy, colonial officials had also begun turning their attention towards the exercise of administrative control over their new African wards as well as fashioning a regular local administration. From 1892, Johnston began dividing his administrative area into districts, each of which were to be administered by Collectors. Given the limitations of staff and money, the early Collectors could do little more than maintain their position and expand their authority as opportunity offered.<sup>18</sup> They may have been able to impose their will on Africans in the immediate vicinity of their stations but were forced to depend on the support

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18. C.A. Cardew, "Nyasaland in 1894-5," The Nyasaland Journal, 1,1 (1948), p.52.



of African authorities for any more positive approach to the more distant areas. The indigenous authorities who came to be used as intermediaries to establish and maintain contact between the colonial power and the African populace were the traditional chiefs. Although no clearly defined policy was formulated regarding relationships between white administrators and traditional authorities, Johnston seems to have given instructions to the Collectors "to uphold as much as possible the power of the chiefs" and to regard them as "the representatives of the people towards the Collector."<sup>19</sup> Chiefs thus came to be charged with the duties of keeping law and order, aiding the collection of taxes and supplying labour for public works. It would have been impossibly expensive to operate only with expatriate personnel, whether or not it was thought to be in the best interests of policy to do so. As elsewhere in colonial Africa, the British found in Malawi that no system of administration could function effectively without this buffer of local indigenous employees who were generally chiefs, selected partly for their loyalty to the colonial government and partly on the basis of their local influence and legitimacy.<sup>20</sup>

But by the turn of the new century, there had resulted a general decline in chiefly authority

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19. B.C.A.G., 1 January 1894, p.4, report by J.O. Bowhill, Collector of Chikwawa dated 1 October 1893.

20. For a good general analysis of this process with examples drawn from Uganda, see D.A. Low, "Lion rampant," Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, 2,3 (1964), pp.235-52.

particularly in the central and southern regions of the Protectorate. A leading colonial official, H.L. Duff, remarked of the surviving chiefs in these regions as being generally "not chiefs any longer, but only headmen under British control, with an authority more or less nominal over inferior headmen in their vicinity."<sup>21</sup> A number of factors in combination explain this general dissolution of chiefly power.

As we have seen, the series of little wars waged by Johnston had led to the breakdown of the larger-scale political systems of the Yao and southern Ngoni. This dismantling of the power of the larger African polities in the central and southern regions also appears to have been a deliberate policy. Johnston seems to have wanted to preserve the indigenous system only in its intermediate ranges to help him to administer the rural African populace; at the level of the larger chieftaincy, indigenous organization would be "too large, too powerful, too aggressive to exist side by side with a European administration, and accordingly it was dissolved."<sup>22</sup> The effective level of participation for traditional rulers, as Johnston saw it, would be no higher than tax collecting and the dispensation of customary law under the supervision of white officers. But the employment of chiefs in order to carry out the business of administration further weakened their power. During the 1890s,

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21. H.L. Duff, Nyasaland under the Foreign Office (2nd. edition, London, 1905), pp.194-5.

22. ibid., p.288.



before taxation had been imposed in the north, chiefs in the other regions were used generally in the collection of hut-tax. Taxation was deeply resented by Africans for reasons which we shall explain in the following chapter, and by having to undertake its collection chiefs were undermining their local standing. Added to this were the pressures of the white planters. Unlike their counterparts in the northern region, chiefs elsewhere in the Protectorate were involved in the requisition of labour for European plantations. Those chiefs who resided on white estates in the Shire Highlands were used by the European landowners to force African residents to provide labour for the cultivation of crops, and it was therefore not surprising that Africans should move away from the chiefs onto neighbouring Crown lands.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the private recruitment of labourers from districts in the central region made people move away from their chiefs who were being bribed by labour agents with presents and drink to force their subjects to work for white planters.

By 1901 a growing movement of people away from their chiefs was reported in many parts of central and southern Malawi and there was a progressive breaking up of large villages into smaller units often comprising no more than a collection of a few huts under the leadership of a headman.<sup>24</sup> The power of the chiefs was breaking

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23. F.O.2/606, Annual report for the British Central Africa Protectorate for the year 1901-02, P.R.O., London. For distinctions between private estates and Crown lands, see Chap.3.

24. For a different analysis reaching a similar conclusion see J.C. Mitchell, The Yao Village (Manchester, 1956), pp.39-41.

down and the administration was increasingly forced to rely on "the police...for all purposes" as the "merely nominal chiefs" played "no real part in the affairs of their country."<sup>25</sup> This general disintegration of chiefly authority led the government, during the first decade of the twentieth century, to take over from the chiefs their duties of tax collection and labour recruitment. It appears to have realized that the tasks of indigenous rulers had to be made less onerous if the British were not to destroy completely their standing and hence their utility for administrative purposes. The administrative duties of the chiefs were lightened but they remained the local agents of the government. The chiefs were thus being provided with an opportunity to resume their previous close relationship with the people. To some extent they were successful in doing this but such was the decline in their traditional power that they continued to be looked upon as "headmen under British control."<sup>26</sup>

North of Kasungu, however, there seems to have been a light overrule among the Tonga and Nkhonde after 1896 and the northern Ngoni after 1904, established for the most part with African consent and which left the indigenous political systems substantially intact. The administrative duties that the chiefs were asked to

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25. S.S. Murray, Handbook of Nyasaland (London, 1932), pp. 126-8; F.O.2/606, Annual report...for the year 1901-02 P.R.O., London.

26. R.S. Hudson, Report on Development of Local Government in Nyasaland (London, 1951), p.1; review by Sir Philip Mitchell in the Journal of African Administration, 3,2 (1951), p.57.



perform were not too onerous. They were concerned with keeping the peace, looking after roads, sanitation in villages, etc., Direct European administration was also not prominent as in the Shire Highlands; the larger areas for which northern officers were responsible made "dictatorial rule more difficult" and, perhaps, less necessary as there were no "settlers' claims to consider."<sup>27</sup> But if the chiefs remained in close relationship with the people, it was also clear that they were gradually becoming officials serving a European colonial administration and that their traditional authority was declining consequent upon the control exercised over them by white district officers. At the same time, evidence of the process of splitting and scattering of villages was not absent. The northern Ngoni paramount, Chimtunga, was proving unable to exert his influence over his sectional chiefs and the unity of the only large state in the country was collapsing. As the kingdom contained a majority of members captured from the surrounding peoples, many of these captives began breaking away under the new conditions of colonial rule to rejoin their own people. Under British rule, also, the large military towns of the Ngoni began breaking up into smaller villages.<sup>28</sup>

Although the tribal system was still continuing to break down by 1910 throughout Nyasaland, the government

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27. Griff Jones, Britain and Nyasaland (London, 1964), p.71.

28. C.O.525/29, Sharpe to C.O., 30 October 1909, P.R.O., London.

also appreciated that it could not operate effectively at the local level without the support of fairly influential chiefs. The decline in chiefly authority was a matter of considerable concern for the government and it now sought to build up the power of the traditional authorities. There was also a growing realization of the need to bring more order and system into African village life generally. It was felt that there was required "an organization to control the rising generation of natives who, finding themselves without the restraining influences to which their parents were accustomed, have of recent years evinced an inclination to emancipate themselves from the disciplinary responsibilities of village life and obedience to authority."<sup>29</sup> The first step towards the solution of these problems was taken by the enactment of the District Administration (Native) Ordinance of 1912.

This ordinance provided for the appointment of Principal and Village Headmen who were to become, in effect, the executive agents of the Protectorate administration in the rural areas under the direction, guidance and supervision of white district officers. In each district administrative sections were to be demarcated and placed in charge of a Principal Headman who would also have two councillors to advise him. In turn, these sections would be sub-divided into village areas which were to be under the charge of a Village

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<sup>29</sup> S.S. Murray (1932 edition), op. cit., p.129.



Headman. No powers were conferred on Principal Headmen to hold tribunals and the functions prescribed for them were mainly in connexion with the maintenance of law and order, the concentration of villages, the construction of roads, the reporting of deaths, etc., No mention was made regarding the utilization of headmen in the collection of tax, possibly, as suggested above, to preserve whatever influence they still retained. All that was indicated was that the Principal Headman was merely "to exert his influence to accelerate the payment of hut and poll taxes."

According to S.S. Murray's reliable account, which has sometimes been misinterpreted because of its confusing and vague presentation, the purpose of the 1912 ordinance "was in no way intended to revivify or perpetuate government by native chiefs. The position of Principal Head-man under the ordinance was in no sense to be similar to the archaic one of Chief." Thus, even if traditional authorities were appointed Principal Headmen they would not be able to function in their traditional, pre-colonial roles which Murray believed, mistakenly, to be absolutely autocratic. But this was not to suggest that no attempt would be made to restore the prestige and authority of chiefs if they became the new Principal Headmen to enable them to function effectively along new lines. For Murray also concluded: "Residents were to indicate carefully by their attitude towards and dealings with Principal Head-men the fact that they were officially recognized as Chiefs of their respective

sections and that, as such, they were entitled to the respect and obedience of their people."<sup>30</sup> Yet the new-type powers of the Principal Headmen were to be limited and were to be exercised under the close control of the white district officer. As Governor Smith pointed out in 1918, it had "been found necessary to build up again between the Government and the people an intermediate power" but one that would derive "its authority from and is directly controlled by the Government." A similar statement was made by the Attorney-General, R.W. Lyall-Grant: "Recently the powers of headmen have been partially revived but only to a very limited extent, not definitely along tribal lines, and in close subordination to intensive district supervision."<sup>31</sup>

The enactment of the 1912 ordinance posed the important question whether appointments to administrative positions in the rural areas should be based on birth or on education and merit. Governor Manning had stated that he wanted to see "the formation in the country of a native subordinate district staff organized from the people themselves and as far as possible chosen by the people themselves."<sup>32</sup> Most likely, however, he still regarded the chiefs as the real representatives of the

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30. S.S. Murray (1932 edition), op. cit., pp.128-130. All quotations in this paragraph are from page 130.

31. C.O.525/78, Smith to C.O., 13 February 1918, and enclosure no.1 by Lyall-Grant dated 30 November 1917, P.R.O., London.

32. C.O.525/43, Manning to C.O., 19 October 1912, P.R.O., London.



African peoples and thought that a selected number of them would constitute the members of the new local administration. And, indeed, most of the major chiefs were made the new Principal Headmen with the next important rulers being appointed as their councillors. The balance of comparatively minor chiefs and headmen were made Village Headmen.<sup>33</sup> But, as we shall see in the next chapter, the impact of western forces had already brought in its train a gradual cultural transformation among African societies. Independent sources of income, western education, Christianity, freedom to travel, were all beginning to throw up independent-minded Africans and making it likely that the chiefs would not be so easily able to command unquestioned obedience. By appointing the traditional authorities as the new subordinate civil servants, an arrangement which formalized the previously convenient situation, the government was thus bound to alienate and make suspicious many of the younger and better educated African elements.

In the eyes of the new, mission-educated men - clerks, school-teachers, ministers of religion - chiefs had, over the years, become civil servants and no longer the real representatives of their people. The use of chiefs to promote British regulations and the open

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33. See, for example, the oral evidence of J.C. Abraham, first-grade administrative officer with sixteen years administrative experience in Nyasaland, dated 21 March 1928 to the Commission on Closer Union of the Dependencies in Eastern and Central Africa. Mimeograph in F.C.O. Library, London.

control of white district officers had clearly underlined the dependence of chiefs upon the Protectorate government and lessened their traditional authority. Under the new ordinance, the chiefs were not only being confirmed as the agents of the colonial administration at the district level but, of greater importance for the new men, were also being regarded officially as the authentic channels of communication between the people of their district and the European district officer (known after March 1906 as the District Resident). To many of the educated elements this was an intolerable position. The chiefs had become essentially government servants and had lost their role as tribal leaders. Believing themselves to be the successful pioneers of a new way of life and seeing themselves as more effective intermediaries between Africans and Europeans, the new elite began to assert its claims to represent the African viewpoint and to lead their people into the new European-dominated society. They now began forming district organizations to expound African aspirations and grievances in European terms.

"Members of the Association being natives of the country and acquainted with all the habits and customs of the people...could adequately express their desires and needs to the Government; and being educated...could fully explain the mind of the Government to the people." 34

Because of the destruction of relevant records burned in the fire in the Nyasaland Secretariat in 1919,

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34. S1/2065/19, Resident to C.S., 6 November 1919, enclosing constitution of the West Nyasa Native Association, M.N.A., Zomba.



there is no direct evidence to support the present argument which is based partly on similar developments in western Kenya,<sup>35</sup> and partly on a brief interview with one of the founders of these new district organizations.<sup>36</sup> An article by Levi Mumba, one of the founders of the North Nyasa Native Association, though written in 1924 does, however, provide sufficient justification for the validity of our analysis. Its relevant paragraph bears quoting at extensive length.

"...from the time when the Protectorate was organized into districts there has existed what are termed annual meetings of chiefs and headmen at which native matters of interest are supposed to be discussed and thus an opportunity given to natives to bring any grievances or matters of interest they have to the notice of the authorities. The largest district court house that I know is not capable of accommodating comfortably more than 15 headmen, guards and interpreter included, and the low voice of the Resident or that of his interpreter, both of whom address their remarks to headmen who are sitting at their feet, is not heard by the larger number of people who are sitting all around the court outside. This procedure is a direct discouragement to councillors and other men who accompanied the chief or headman, in some cases for a journey of 3 or more days, only to find that they are shut out and are unable to hear anything of the proceedings. On the other hand the headman is there deprived of his councillors and advisers who have always assisted him at such gatherings in village life. Such meetings are quite understood by the native as he regards them as equivalent to his own custom of a 'purification day' and is therefore surprised to find that any headman

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35. Bethwell A. Ogot, "British Administration in the Central Nyanza District of Kenya, 1900-60," Journal of African History, 4,2 (1963), pp.249-53.

36. Interview with the late Robert Gwebe Nyirenda at Karonga, Malawi. Mr. Nyirenda was one of the founders of the North Nyasa Native Association.

who takes a different view from that of the Resident is looked upon as perverse. For fear of offending the Resident in this way it is now a custom to say 'Yes' when they mean 'No' and vice versa. This state of affairs is not peculiar to any one district and the educated natives on seeing it thought that it would not be good citizenship merely to deplore a situation without trying to do something to remedy it, however inefficient their effort; they therefore decided to organize political associations because they are convinced that the information obtained by the Resident in the way stated cannot be representative native public opinion." 37

The timing of the District Administration ordinance may therefore explain the formation in 1912 of the North Nyasa Native Association and in 1914 of the West Nyasa Native Association.<sup>38</sup> The ordinance was applied, in the first place, to a few districts outside the southern region such as North Nyasa and West Nyasa. The centres of European settlement in the Shire Highlands were deliberately avoided as many of the chiefs resided on white estates and difficulties would arise in connexion with the rights of landowners.<sup>39</sup> This fact may help us to answer the question posed by Professor J. van Velsen as to why Native Associations arose initially in the north rather than the south where the constraints of the colonial and planting systems were far more severe on

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37. Levi Z. Mumba, "Native Associations," Zo Ona, 24 April 1924, p.1.

38. J. van Velsen, "The Establishment of the Administration in Tongaland," in Historians in Tropical Africa (Salisbury, 1962), pp.180, 182, where he alludes to this connexion with regard to the formation of the West Nyasa Native Association.

39. S.S. Murray (1932 edition), op. cit., p.133.



Africans and where such political groups were more likely to have originated.<sup>40</sup>

Yet these early secular political initiatives along modern lines did not lie exclusively with the Livingstonia-trained Africans. Certainly, for reasons which shall be explained in the next chapter, political organizations were to be late in appearing in the central region. But in the south at least two bodies were formed before 1912 which although less enduring than the Native Associations were "surely the prototype of native self-help associations" in the northern region.<sup>41</sup> Shepperson and Price have brought to our attention the case of the African Industrial Society which was founded in 1911,<sup>42</sup> and Dr. Rotberg has shown the existence of an earlier organization, founded in 1909 by the same Blantyre-educated Africans, and which was known as the Native Industrial Union.<sup>43</sup> These two bodies may have been the same body, the one continuing into the other under a different title, or they may have been two attempts at different times to create a similar organization. They will be considered more fully in chapter four. At this stage, however, it simply needs to be pointed out that these organizations pioneered the way for the later

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40. J. van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups in Malawi," in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, eds., The Zambezian Past, op. cit., pp.378, 408-9.

41. George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African (Edinburgh, 1958), p.415.

42. ibid., pp.166-171.

43. Unpublished and untitled paper on the 1915 Rising in Nyasaland by Robert I. Rotberg.

Native Associations which were formed in the northern region. It could perhaps be argued that these early southern ventures were mainly of the self-improvement category and were not politically oriented as the Native Associations. Even if this was the case, and it most likely is not, it is now becoming evident that educated Africans in the south were also considering the need for political groups though Native Associations were only to be started there in the 1920s. For example, and there may well be even earlier instances, in his evidence to the 1915 Native Rising Commission, the Rev. Stephen Kundecha of the Blantyre Mission suggested the creation of a secular "native council" which would be more representative of African opinion than the existing meetings of chiefs and white officials.<sup>44</sup>

No records are available to inform us about what the two northern Native Associations discussed before the outbreak of the first World War and their consequent decision to temporarily halt their activities. Nevertheless, during a period when, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, indigenous political activity of a modern type was being channelled through independent African churches, there were here the beginnings of a parallel secular response which was to become the major avenue for African political agitation during the inter-war years. For our present purpose, the importance of these early Native

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44. C.O.525/66, Smith to C.O., 7 February 1916, enclosure no.C, notes of evidence of witnesses: Reverend Stephen Kundecha dated 9 July 1915, P.R.O., London.



Associations lies in their role in meeting the growing need for effective political leadership among the African people. It is necessary here to make a distinction between politics and administration. The new colonial invaders were the ones solely involved in the policy-making process. It was they who decided how the African peoples should be protected, exploited or developed. Once the policies had been determined, it was the task of the white district officers with the aid of the chiefs and headmen to ensure their implementation. The traditional authorities had therefore become wholly administrators. On the other hand, the mass of the people, including the new educated elements, were neither participants in the policy-making bodies nor concerned with the task of implementing policies. There were no institutions of local government in which the indigenous people, apart from the chiefs, could be involved. As a result, Native Associations were an attempt by educated Africans to provide effective African leadership at a time when the chiefs had lost or abandoned or become unable to perform adequately their traditional political responsibilities.<sup>45</sup>

It is essential, however, that differences between the chiefs and the new aspirant generation should not be exaggerated. Many chiefs had taken the initiative in inviting African Christian teachers into their villages

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45. For a partially similar analysis, see J.A. Barnes, "Indigenous Politics and Colonial Administration with special reference to Australia," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 2,2 (1960), pp.147-8.

and there were no acute conflicts as yet between the traditionalist leadership and the new converts. Indeed, it is very likely that many chiefs must have looked to prominent African Christians for advice and help in their relationship with the alien administration. Many of the new men also seem to have been drawn from the families of chiefs especially as missionary societies tended to base their evangelical and educational institutions at the headquarters of chiefs.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the chiefs themselves may have been critical of the 1912 ordinance to a certain extent especially as it represented an attempt to introduce more direct rule and control by European district officers. There may, in consequence, have been some need for co-operation between the traditional and new elements in the face of the government's native policy.

More importantly, it is necessary to note that these new men were still a very small minority and that their behaviour remained extremely untypical. Many African societies, especially the ones on the fringes of contact with modernization, such as those in the Upper and Lower Shire districts and on the western Malawi border with Zambia had not yet thrown up such men, and continued to be led and guided by established rulers. Change in and between African societies, often as a result of European pressures and opportunities, was uneven with important

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46. A number of examples could be given but it may be noted, as a brief illustration, that both I.M. Jere and Y.Z. Mwase, co-founders respectively of the North Nyasa and West Nyasa Native Associations, were of chiefly origin.



ramifications for the emergence and development of modern-style African political activity. It is to these western forces and their import for the character and rise of modern African politics that we must now turn.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Economic and Social Factors in the Development of Modern African Politics.

To understand modern forms of African political action in colonial Malawi, it is necessary to uncover the various circumstances that have conditioned their growth and character. Modern forms of African politics have been the product of the stimulation or provocation of (a) that cluster of phenomena known generally as 'Westernism' and (b) the frustrations and grievances attendant upon the impact of such phenomena.<sup>1</sup> By the term 'Westernism' we refer to a broad range of situations that have resulted from the intrusion of Western influences. In the present chapter, we shall concern ourselves mainly with a number of economic and social factors that affected the political scene in Nyasaland before 1914 and consider the ways in which they have stimulated, or delayed, the growth of modern African political sentiment and activity. In a number of ways the consequences of these factors for the emergence of African politics are obvious. But the impact of 'Westernism' was uneven throughout the Protectorate with the result that there were important variations in the development and nature of modern African politics. To account for these varied political reactions, to clarify the context within which these responses arose, and to

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1. See James S. Coleman, "Current Political Movements in Africa," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 298 (1955), pp.95-108.



explain the non-existence or slow growth of modern African political activity in some areas, we must examine these western forces and their attendant situations in some detail.

### Revenue and taxation

Harry Johnston's most pressing need during his Commissionership was a continuous and increasing flow of revenue. All that the British Government was willing to finance were the salaries of Johnston and his deputy Alfred Sharpe and two small gunboats on the lake. The £10,000 annual subsidy granted by Cecil Rhodes was wholly required for the maintenance of an armed force and money from other sources had to be found to finance the other government expenditures.

In the second set of treaties that were negotiated with most of the African societies that peacefully accepted British political control, a clause was contained whereby the African peoples agreed to contribute to the expenses of the administration in return for the boon of the administration's peace. Again, whenever a punitive expedition was undertaken against a recalcitrant Yao chief, a treaty ceding sovereign rights to the Crown and agreement to pay taxes was made a condition of peace. At first, a poll tax of 4s. a head was levied but, from 1893, an annual hut tax of 3s. was adopted.

For most of the years of his Commissionership up to 1896, Johnston could only depend for his revenue on a limited area confined to the Shire Highlands and Shire Valley. Only when the Yao slavers were finally defeated

in late 1895 was tax collected throughout the southern region; and only by 1897, when the chiefs in the other regions had accepted British sovereignty, were tax demands imposed in the rest of the Protectorate with the exception of the northern Ngoni who began paying tax in 1906. In addition to this limitation, Johnston was confronted with the administrative difficulty of enforcing taxation in the southern region. The principle of taxation was unknown to the African peoples and its imposition was deeply resented. Tributes and gifts from the people to their chiefs had been common but these were offerings of a voluntary nature and in recognition and support of the authority of the chiefs. The white man's tax, however, was a strange concept involving a revolutionary innovation in African life. African peoples who lived by subsistence farming were now being forced to seek paid labour to earn money to meet their tax obligations. Tax came to be identified with labour which Africans were not willing to perform and tax evasion became widespread. Up to 1896, the pressures of the hut tax were a source of discontent mainly for Africans living in the Shire Highlands. Outside these upland areas, in the rest of the southern region, Johnston found it difficult to ensure that his taxes were fully paid. The influence of his Collectors hardly extended beyond the government station and the local chiefs, not wishing to court unpopularity with their subjects, were not always reliable in tax-collection. Force could not readily be resorted to since the army was invariably tied up in meeting the threat of



the Yao slavers. Nonetheless, evidence exists which shows that small expeditions of Zanzibari and Makua soldiery were sent to punish villagers refusing to pay tax by burning down their huts and confiscating their grain and livestock.<sup>2</sup> Such aggressive methods were most probably confined to the areas in and around the infant townships of Blantyre and Zomba where the administration exercised its greatest control during the 1890s. It is probably here, therefore, that the imposition of hut tax and the "bullying manner" of the soldiers<sup>3</sup> created the most African discontent and proved that the acceptance of British protection by the Mangoch Yao and Nyanja peoples was not an altogether unmixed blessing. And it was here, as we shall see in the next chapter, that Joseph Booth was able to attract his main body of early African support by condemning the government's tax impositions.

Such were the problems and difficulties that Johnston received only £700 in taxes in 1892 and £1,639 in 1893, sums which accounted for a negligible proportion of his total expenditure. Nor could tax revenues be bolstered initially by the levying of import duties as they were forbidden by the provisions of certain international agreements.<sup>4</sup> By 1894 the Protectorate

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2. Rev. Andrew C. Ross, "The African - A Child or a Man...." in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, eds., The Zambesian Past (Manchester, 1966), pp.344-6.

3. James Johnston, Reality versus Romance in South Central Africa (London, 1893), pp.291-2.

4. A.J. Hanna, The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia, 1859-1895 (Oxford, 1956), pp.224-5.

administration was in deficit to the sum of £22,766 and things had taken an even worse turn when a crisis developed in the relations between Johnston and Cecil Rhodes which had serious financial implications. In the end, however, the British Government intervened and agreed to provide the Protectorate with a fixed annual grant while prevailing upon the Treasury to assume responsibility for the colonial administration's debts. In November 1894 an agreement was also concluded resulting in the administrative separation of the Protectorate from Rhodes' Company's sphere and the ending of the relationship between them in June 1895. At the same time Johnston was urged to ensure that the Protectorate became economically self-supporting as quickly as possible. The grant-in-aid had to be progressively reduced and the budget balanced by increasing local revenues. Such demands by a parsimonious British Treasury during the life of a pioneer and embryonic colonial administration in a largely undeveloped territory, were to condition the type of economic policy evolved initially by Johnston and his successors in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency.

The foundations of a revenue which would make the Protectorate economically self-supporting could not rest alone on customs duties and annual hut taxes from Africans. Even if these particular sources of revenue were to be substantially increased, then the people had to have the capacity to earn cash incomes on which tax could be levied, an opportunity which hardly existed



north of the Shire Highlands. In order to solve his critical financial problems and to build up a local revenue, Johnston turned to the European planters to develop a viable agricultural economy, more especially as the Protectorate showed no evidence of mineral wealth. It was a common belief at that time that the African who lived by subsistence farming, who knew little or nothing of a cash economy, would not be able alone to produce the revenue that was required to make the Protectorate pay its way. In the government's subsequent economic policy, therefore, African agricultural production for export was ignored and emphasis placed rather on the growth of a modern agricultural economy linked to European production. The contribution of Africans to the economic development of their country was to lie in the provision of labour for white planters from whom they could earn cash incomes on which tax could be levied.

#### Land and labour<sup>5</sup>

In the few years prior to the promulgation of a Protectorate in 1891, a number of planters, traders and concession-seekers of all nationalities had begun entering Malawi for the purpose of acquiring land. On

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5. For a good detailed discussion of these topics, see B.S. Krishnamurthy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland 1891-1914, Ph.D., London, 1964, Chaps.3-5. An interesting general discussion of these subjects is contained in Elliot J. Berg, "The Development of a Labour Force in Sub-Saharan Africa," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 13,4 (1965), pp.394-412.

assuming charge, Johnston found that much of the fertile southern region had been 'sold' to whites for absurdly low sums<sup>6</sup> by African chiefs who had no customary right to alienate freehold land. Much land had been sold in exchange for highly-coveted trade goods which could not otherwise be easily obtained. Only the Yao slavers in the Upper Shire district, who organized trading caravans to the East African coast and who could thus secure such goods from the Arabs, saw no need to cede land to the whites. In most cases, however, the chiefs could not have understood the bargains they entered into with the Europeans. African customary law never treated land as a property and consequently it could not be sold by chiefs but merely allotted for temporary use. It must also be emphasized that even in those cases where chiefs received financial payment in a land transaction, they had no intention of surrendering permanent freehold ownership. As a result, throughout the colonial period, Africans were to condemn these transactions, to claim that they had been illegally deprived of their lands, and to ask the government to recover these lands from the whites.<sup>7</sup>

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6. For some examples of such 'purchases', see W.H.J. Rangeley, "Early Blantyre," The Nyasaland Journal, 7,1 (1954), p.40.

7. See, for example, the various African evidence to the 1946 Land Commission, Vol.2, in the F.C.O. Library, London. See also NS 2/1/4, Annual report on the Southern Province for the year 1931 by A.J. Brackenbury, Provincial Commissioner: "The question whether big landowners...were entitled to the land which they had acquired in the old days from the Native Chiefs was asked at a large gathering of the Native Association at Chiradzulu which was attended by many natives and chiefs. This question has also been widely discussed amongst the educated natives who are bitter on the subject and take it much to heart." M.N.A., Zomba.



On his arrival, Johnston set about dealing with the land question, regularizing the various transactions, and arranging a land settlement. All existing land claims were investigated and when Johnston was satisfied that the vendor had received a fair price for the land sold, and that sufficient safeguards had been made for the protection of original inhabitants living on the land, then the claim was confirmed and the claimant issued with a deed called a 'Certificate of Claim'. Every such document contained a clause safeguarding African rights - that all land occupied by African villages or plantations existing at the time of issuance of the deed should not be disturbed and was to be exempted from the price of the purchase. At the same time the European owner was permitted to prevent the opening of any new gardens or plantations upon his land. An equally important consideration for Johnston was his need to increase local revenue and make the Protectorate pay its way. He thus secured for the Crown "all unoccupied and unclaimed waste land" and also obtained from chiefs in their treaties territorial rights either as 'purchase' or 'cession'.<sup>8</sup> He thus hoped to be able to encourage further European settlement and use the profits derived from land for the development of the Protectorate. Limited plots of land would be leased for short periods and even then not more

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8. For Johnston's report on the 1893 land settlement, see F.O.403/185, Johnston to F.O., 14 October 1893, P.R.O., London. See also A.J. Hanna, op. cit., pp.190-2, 234-5.

than a quarter would be so alienated, leaving the rest available for African demands.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of 1893 Johnston had rapidly confirmed most of the white-owned holdings. Altogether some one million acres were alienated to European planters apart from 2.7 million acres granted to the British South Africa Company in the North Nyasa district. The right to this latter area had been acquired by the African Lakes Company between 1885 and 1891 and had been transferred to the B.S.A. Company in 1893. This territory was never brought under active occupation by the Company and never attracted more than a handful of white settlers. Eventually, in 1936, title to the land was renounced by the Company. It was the remaining one million acres, consisting of about one half of the fertile and healthy Shire Highlands, which attracted white planters and where a settler-oriented community became established. Extensive land alienation, therefore, was confined to the upland areas of southern Malawi though a few thousand acres were later sold in freehold or granted under lease in the central region. And it was in the south that African land grievances and other related economic injustices were to be most acutely felt.

The majority of Europeans who had purchased land had done so in the hope of finding exploitable minerals and becoming rich quickly. But although some coal, silver

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9. F.O.84/2197, Johnston to F.O., 13 October 1892;  
F.O.2/106, Johnston to F.O., 4 March 1896, enclosure  
no.1, P.R.O., London.



and lead were discovered, the limited extent of the deposits and the long distance to markets coupled with problems of transportation, made mineral exploitation impossible for the time being. Attention consequently began to be centred on agriculture. Of the number of crops in which experiments were conducted coffee promised the best results and became, during the 1890s, the Protectorate's chief agricultural export. But the high hopes placed in coffee were dashed shortly after the turn of the century. Partly the cause of decline was the adoption of faulty methods of cultivation; partly the competition of the expanding Brazilian coffee industry; and partly the lack of adequate transportation and communications. Most important for our purpose, however, was the growing shortage of labour which became serious just when coffee production was reaching its peak. The supply of labour was certainly plentiful in the dry season but during the vital rainy months when planters most needed labour and when Africans were most busy planting and hoeing their own gardens, few workers were available.<sup>10</sup> At the same time the expansion of the coffee industry led to a corresponding boom in the transport business which relied heavily on porters for the carriage of goods. Without a railway, nearly all goods had to be handled by large numbers of carriers especially as tsetse-fly prohibited the use of draught animals. The

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10. See, for example, letters to the British Central Africa Gazette (B.C.A.G.), 15 May 1897, pp.2-3 from white planters complaining of labour shortage during the crucial rainy season.

growth of the transport industry, which also paid higher wages than planters, seriously hampered the development of white estates and a number of them had to be abandoned.<sup>11</sup>

At the time, restriction in the supply of labour was due partly to the poor conditions on white estates. Africans from outside the Shire Highlands were becoming less willing to find work on white plantations because of poor working and living conditions<sup>12</sup> and when government agents forced them to take up such employment to pay off their hut tax this added to their hatred of taxation.<sup>13</sup> But of greater importance was the disinclination of a considerable number of adult males to work anywhere. The attractions of imported goods and the gradual conversion of customary obligations into money payments had been stimulated by missionary activity and had created a growing propensity to engage in income-earning activity. But changes of this sort do not happen quickly and it was clear that the numbers who chose to earn money by wage

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11. See F.O.2/307, Report on the Trade and General Conditions of the British Central Africa Protectorate from 1 April 1899 to 31 March 1900, sections on railway and labour. See also F.O.2/470 for the report for 1 April 1900 to 31 March 1901. Both in P.R.O., London.
12. See, for example, B.C.A.G., 24 June 1899, p.3 for criticisms of conditions of workers on white estates by Commissioner Alfred Sharpe. See also F.O.2/470, Report on the Trade...from 1 April 1900 to 31 March 1901 in which Sharpe wrote with regard to planters not providing sufficient food for their labourers: "There is no doubt that in some instances their term of labour has been a period of semi-starvation." P.R.O., London.
13. See, for example, M.W. Retief, William Murray of Nyasaland (Lovedale, 1953), p.67.



earning were still inadequate to meet the demand for labour. European planters, however, could not afford to wait for expansion of wants to incite Africans to leave the villages for work, and government, with an eye to revenue, enacted in 1901 tax proposals to pressure Africans to take up paid employment. Henceforward, Africans failing to work for a European for one month in a year were to pay a 6s. tax instead of the normal 3s. per annum. The result was an immediate increase in the supply of labour. But the tax scheme was tantamount to a policy of forced labour and evoked deep resentment among Africans.<sup>14</sup> Those who could obtain cash through other means, such as by selling their produce, and thus meet their tax obligations were now being forced to work for whites against their will especially if they did not wish to pay a higher tax. Certainly for the mass of Africans taxation had become an even more onerous burden.

African land rights had also begun to disappear. For some years white planters had been encouraging the settlement of Africans on their estates to obtain the labour that was essential to their development. Lomwe immigrants from Mozambique had been encouraged to settle on white holdings and the original residents had also been induced to move unhindered on to white-owned lands, which was happening anyway because of the shifting mode of cultivation and the African habit of periodically moving

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14. See African evidence to the Commission...to Inquire into...the Native Rising Within the Nyasaland Protectorate in C.O.525/66, Smith to C.O., 7 February 1916, enclosure no.C, P.R.O., London.

the sites of their villages. At first the planters had raised no objections to this movement and had charged no rent. But with the shortage of labour becoming more serious, landowners, from the early 1900s, began demanding rent from their African 'tenants' or asking for labour service irrespective of whether these were original residents, exempted by Johnston from payment of rent, or new settlers. At the same time Commissioner Sharpe, in order to help the planters to acquire their labour more easily and also to enable his administration collect revenue more conveniently, had in 1900 allowed European landholders to pay the tax themselves of Africans resident on their estates. Landowners could then recover the amount by getting the Africans to work for them. Such a policy placed great power in the hands of white landholders over their tenants with regard to local labour. Now all African residents were called upon to work for two months during the crucial wet season, one month to satisfy their tax requirements and another month to meet their rent. If they refused to pay their rent they were liable to be evicted. The new arrangements struck particularly heavily on the original residents; by being encouraged to move off their original land sites they now had to pay rent and had, moreover, lost their land. The system also seriously hampered the African's food production as he now had to work at a time when he required to look after his own garden. Yet the planters wanted labour, not money rent, and they exerted all possible pressure on African residents to discharge



their obligations by working them off. In extreme cases Africans were forbidden to work for another employer until they had fulfilled their duties to their landlord.

Johnston's land settlement had been too ambiguous on African land rights and had not foreseen the movement of people particularly in the course of shifting cultivation. The consequences were the loss of African land rights and their becoming little more than serfs with absolute insecurity of tenure. This situation with some of its related abuses was vividly portrayed by the 1903 Land Commission:

"No tenure is recognized in the native, who is treated as a tenant at will, and who is frequently subject to the arbitrary demands of an often autocratic and sometimes uneducated master. In some cases the native is not allowed to sell the produce of his own garden except to the proprietor of the estate. In nearly every case the custom of the estate permits him to work only for the proprietor. The practice, which should henceforth be abolished, of informally permitting the planter to pay the tax of the native direct to the Collector without the appearance of the native in person at the Collector's office, has, we fear, in some cases been abused. The taxpayer has been retained by the proprietor until the end of the year as an 'inducement' to the native to comply with his demands for labour service, etc., whenever called upon." 15

Many Africans, in order to avoid paying rent, attempted to move off European landholdings and to settle on neighbouring Crown lands. But the amount of land at

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15. F.O.2/748, Pearce to C.O., 7 July 1903, enclosure no.1, Report of Land Commission dated 6 May 1903, P.R.O., London. For similar criticisms of the deterioration of African land rights, see the Judgement by Judge Nunan in Supervisor of Native Affairs vs Blantyre and East Africa Limited, 28 April 1903, which is contained as a supplement to the B.C.A.G., April 1903.

the disposal of the Crown in the Shire Highlands was limited and inadequate to meet rising African needs. African discontent at having their land taken away from them was thus heightened and aggravated by the government's rather lenient policy of leasing large amounts of Crown land to new white settlers and white companies. In 1901 a further blow was struck when Judge Nunan came to a decision that the chiefs had no right of ownership over the soil; only the Commissioner could alienate land.<sup>16</sup> As a result both the chiefs and their people became tenants of the Crown and could be moved and shifted at the will of the Commissioner. Their position was just as insecure as those living on private estates. Africans grew more alarmed as they saw scarce Crown land being alienated in large amounts, especially the vast subsidy land being earmarked for the new railway, which could instead have become available for their own settlement. Although Sharpe tried to confine such land grants generally to leaseholds and for fairly short periods, nevertheless, both on Crown lands and European-owned lands, Africans had lost their rights.

The 1903 Land Commission set up to inquire into African land rights decided that because of the large influx of Lomwe immigrants on to white estates and the shifting methods of agriculture of local Africans, it was impossible to ascertain either the original residents or the land they had occupied when the Certificate of Claim

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16. F.O.403/215, Cox vs African Lakes Corporation, 23 July 1901, P.R.O., London.



was granted. Its recommendations therefore included no distinction between original residents and African newcomers. The Commission advocated a "limitation of the rent due from the native upon some proper system" and in return for such rent "the allocation to him or to his village community of a defined area of land sufficient for his cultivation under the ordinary native custom."<sup>17</sup> These recommendations were embodied in the Native Locations Ordinance of 1904 which directed the landowners to devote one-tenth of their undeveloped lands as native locations which would become vested in the village community on a communal tenure and upon which Africans would be settled on the basis of eight acres per family. Each tenant was to pay the owner of the land an annual rent of 3s. per hut. But these provisions were never implemented, mainly because of planter opposition. Landowners continued to charge rent or demand the performance of labour services in commutation of rent, a practice which became known as tangata. African land and labour grievances were not redressed, continued to remain unameliorated, and were to be an important underlying cause of the 1915 Native Rising.

#### The immigrant communities

Throughout the period up to 1918, the European community in Nyasaland was always a tiny one. In the absence of mineral discoveries and reliable and efficient

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17. F.O.2/748, Pearce to F.O., 7 July 1903, enclosure no.1, Report of Land Commission, P.R.O., London.

communications, few Europeans were willing to invest or settle in the Protectorate especially as better opportunities existed in neighbouring territories. By 1913 it was estimated that there were "only some 750 Europeans, including Government officials, females and children. Of this number of Europeans about 100 are Government officials, 200 missionaries and only about 107 planters."<sup>18</sup>

Despite their small numbers the planters were looked upon as a fundamental element in the economic development of the country. They also had a certain community of interests and objectives and their views were given regular airing in the pages of the local settler organ, The Nyasaland Times. They were for ever complaining about labour scarcity, urging government to adopt measures to increase the African labour supply, and opposing vehemently any proposals for stimulating African agriculture. The role that they expected Africans to play was essentially that of rural labourers. They scorned and sneered at the educated African and resented the educative influence of the missionaries on Africans. The provision of literary education was invariably criticized especially when they felt that it was at the expense of practical training which would teach Africans skills useful for working on white estates.<sup>19</sup> In many ways their ideas and views were similar to those of the Kenya white

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18. GOA 5/3/1, Notes on Nyasaland by Acting Governor, F.B. Pearce, dated August 1913, M.N.A., Zomba.

19. For an interesting general discussion on the attitudes and motives of white planters in Malawi, see C.O.525/49, Pearce to C.O., 14 June 1913, P.R.O., London.



settlers.<sup>20</sup> Like them they may also have looked forward to the time when, as with British colonists elsewhere, they would receive self-government. But the Colonial Office in London refused to build up their hopes in this direction. It had no intention of handing over responsibility to the European settlers especially as they were too few in number and unable to defend themselves, though it did agree to grant them some limited unofficial representation in the Legislative Council which was formed in 1907.<sup>21</sup>

If the settlers posed no immediate political threat, their presence had created many economic and social grievances, particularly for Africans living in the Shire Highlands. Social prejudice and discrimination grieved many Africans particularly the educated ones. The housing and feeding of labourers on white estates left much to be desired, and the exactions of the landowners were often onerous.<sup>22</sup> The abuses, injustices and insults that Africans were made to suffer were to provide ample material for anti-European discussions by African political movements, one of which, led by the Rev. John Chilembwe, was to attempt forcibly to drive out many of the hated white men from the country in 1915. But so tiny and aloof

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20. See M.P.K. Sorrenson, Origins of European Settlement in Kenya (Nairobi, 1968), Chap. 14 for a discussion of settler viewpoints.

21. C.O.525/17, Sharpe to C.O., 28 February 1907; C.O.525/19, Manning to C.O., 7 November 1907; C.O.525/29, Pearce to C.O., 27 September 1909 - all P.R.O., London.

22. F.O.2/747, Pearce to F.O., 18 May 1903, P.R.O., London.

was the settler group that few Africans had any direct contact with the planters.. Most people saw them, if at all, only as figures in the distance. Of all the white groups in Malawi it was the missionary element that was in closest contact with the African peoples.

The Blantyre Mission was the only missionary society in any way closely involved with the white planters of the Shire Highlands. During the 1890s, when it was under the leadership of the Rev. D.C. Scott, the mission was an outspoken critic of the planters and the administration, and it also attempted "to let the Church grow so as to express both the dignity of individual Africans and to give an African quality to its Christianity."<sup>23</sup> But after Scott's departure in January 1898 his conception of an African Church gradually broke down and the Blantyre missionaries also came to reflect the growing racial consciousness of the European community as a whole. Under the Rev. A.C. Hetherwick's leadership, multi-racial services, for example, no longer became the normal practice at the mission. Nor did Hetherwick, according to the Rev. Dr. A.C. Ross, achieve "the personal relations with Africans that Scott did" and he was not "so passionately and understandingly negrophile." Criticisms were still levelled against certain government policies and the attitudes and actions of white planters were also called into question. But

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23. A.C. Ross, The Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Mission Blantyre, Nyasaland 1875-1926, Ph.D. Edinburgh, 1968, p.274 and Chaps.6-7.



although they had much to criticize, especially about African land and labour rights, they tended to emphasize the need for Africans to work rather than attack vigorously the abuses which had arisen. The mission had become part of the imperial establishment and its opposition was "more of an acceptable 'Loyal Opposition', basic criticism of the whole colonial structure no longer being part of its function."<sup>24</sup> To a similar but perhaps more limited extent, Dr. K.J. McCracken has indicated that the high degree of tolerance which the Livingstonia missionaries had achieved during the pre-colonial period later deteriorated into occasions of conflict and prejudice. Among several of the missionaries and among supporters of the mission in Scotland there developed that "trend towards racialism evident in Britain from the 1880s and the consequent disenchantment with African leadership which one can find in several other missions at this period, notably on the West Coast." White control of the affairs and activities of the mission was re-asserted which led to differences with leading African converts.<sup>25</sup>

The result was a greater self-awareness and resentment on the side of educated Africans. The inflexible attitude of many missionaries towards African customs and institutions annoyed Africans especially when

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24. *ibid.*, pp.218, 221-22.

25. K.J. McCracken, "Livingstonia as an Industrial Mission, 1875-1900," in Religion in Africa (Edinburgh, 1964), pp.94-5.

the abandonment of some meaningful customs was made a precondition for entry into the church. But for educated Africans it was most probably the caution of missionaries in conferring Africans to positions of authority and responsibility which evoked the most criticism. The superior living and working conditions of mission-employed Europeans in contrast to those of African teachers and licentiates was a further source of complaint. In consequence, a few educated Africans were led to seek control of the new avenues of modernization by founding their own churches and schools many of which took on a political role and which came to constitute the major channels for the ventilation of early African protest.

Harry Johnston had also looked to the Indian for the regeneration of Malawi.<sup>26</sup> He had considered the introduction of Indian peasants partly as a method of conveying 'object-lessons' in industriousness and agricultural technique to the African population, and in 1895 twenty-five Indian families had been brought to the Protectorate. But Indian immigration never became as large as that to the Natal and Kenya. The movement of large numbers of peasantry, especially under the stringent conditions in which the Government of India insisted after its experiences of treatment of Indians in South Africa, would have required organization and

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26. F.O.403/212, Johnston to F.O., 1 June 1895, P.R.O., London.



finance on a scale far beyond the resources of the early Protectorate government.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the bulk of the Indians who came independently to Africa were much more interested in obtaining lucrative openings in trade than in working as peasants. Since opportunities for trade were greater in neighbouring territories than in Nyasaland, the number of Indians who settled in the Protectorate before 1918 was very small, being less than 600. Most of the Indians who entered the country were engaged as traders though a number also came to be employed as soldiers, clerks and artisans in both government and private service.<sup>28</sup>

Asian and European settlement in Malawi was always to be very small. Africans were therefore able to obtain intermediary positions of some responsibility such as those of clerks, storekeepers and telegraph operators, which in neighbouring territories were held by aliens. Posts of middle-grade administrative responsibility were thus opened to Africans earlier and in greater number than elsewhere in East and Central Africa, and despite large-scale African migration to these surrounding countries many of the best educated elements of the emergent African elite were to remain at home either working within the various mission networks or becoming employed in civil and commercial services. The resultant

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27. F.O.2/88, Johnston to F.O., 31 January 1895, P.R.O., London.

28. S.W.P. Appanya, "British Indians in East Africa," The Indian Review, August 1907, pp.595-98.

accumulation of that experience and knowledge of the new social order was to enable many of these literate Africans to play a key role in the political associations and groups through which African protest found expression. Many African civil servants, for example, were members of the Native Associations, and having gained access to information as to the government's political intentions and economic policies, they were able to bring to the deliberations of these bodies that knowledge so necessary for the development of informed African pressure groups.

#### Migration and economic development<sup>29</sup>

One of the major tasks of reconstruction to foster economic recovery after the ending of the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa in 1902 was the reorganization of war-torn industry, particularly the mining industry in the Transvaal. Serious labour shortages in the Transvaal soon led to officials looking to territories to the north for their supply of manpower at a time when the economy of Malawi was stagnant and depressed. The decline in the Malawi coffee industry had stimulated the production of cotton and tobacco but owing to inadequate transport facilities and high freightage charges European planting enterprise continued to remain severely restricted.

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29. For a detailed discussion of these two topics up to 1914, see B.S. Krishnamurthy, op. cit., Chaps.6-8. The final chapter of this work, however, does not bring out clearly the essential differences between conditions in the various parts of the Protectorate.



Africans in search of work found few opportunities to earn cash incomes to defray their taxes. The increase in the labour supply resulting from Sharpe's double-tax system of 1902 could not be fully absorbed by local enterprises. To the Protectorate officials, therefore, emigration seemed a way of bringing additional employment to the people and also extra revenue to the country. Africans who could not earn cash at home to pay their hut tax would thus be able to do so by finding work in South Africa and, also, on their return would stimulate the import trade of the Protectorate through the expenditure of their deferred pay which would enhance revenue from customs duties. After some initial hesitation, Commissioner Sharpe decided to allow an experiment to be made permitting the recruitment of one thousand labourers from Malawi for the Witwatersrand mines.

In 1907, however, with mounting mortality rates in the mines, the experiment was suspended. Certainly the period of the experiment had brought improvements in the economic situation of the Protectorate but after 1908 the position returned to its previous depressed state. As a result, independent migration of Africans to other countries continued to increase. Voluntary migration had been in progress for many years but had been given an enormous impetus by the implementation of the double-tax scheme. It had begun to reach serious proportions by 1907 when it was estimated that over 18,000 males were leaving the Protectorate annually to find employment abroad. With wages in Malawi remaining relatively low and opportunities

for employment in the dry season being limited, workers, stimulated in their wants by missionary teaching and encouraged by reports of greater opportunities in neighbouring territories, were streaming out annually to the labour centres of Rhodesia and South Africa.

European agriculture in Nyasaland was not able to promote the desired internal economic expansion and its scope was limited being confined to the Shire Highlands. Europeans were not willing to invest large sums of capital; a minute percentage of their extensive landholdings remained cultivated; and their farming was highly dependent on facilities like transport which nobody could finance on the required scale. On the other hand there was growing evidence that, given proper encouragement, Africans could grow cash crops quite successfully in certain districts. They had started growing cotton in the Lower and Upper Shire districts and there had been a steady increase in production.<sup>30</sup> Governor Smith had begun to realize the importance of peasant agriculture and could even write in 1914 that "The prosperity of the Protectorate, in my opinion, is more intimately bound up in the enlargement of the native's capacity as an individual producer than in coercive action restricting his activities to European plantations...."<sup>31</sup> But there had been no real concept of African economic development by the time the first World

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30. See, for example, Report of the Director of Agriculture for the year 1909-10, p.5.

31. C.O.525/56, Smith to C.O., 16 May 1914, P.R.O., London.



War broke out.

By 1914 the question of the development of African agriculture had received little attention in the southern region. Some slight emphasis was given to the growing of cotton in the Upper and Lower Shire districts but little was done to improve African methods of farming and to provide African producers with markets and communications. More critically, particularly in the Shire Highlands, there was a serious shortage of land for African farmers. African land grievances were becoming acute because of the natural increase in population, the large immigration of Lomwe from Mozambique,<sup>32</sup> and the alienation of extensive areas to whites. For Africans resident either on white estates or on Crown land in the Shire Highlands, sufficient land and other grievances existed for them to be mobilized by political agitators against the Europeans. Elsewhere in the southern region, however, Africans possessed few serious grievances. By neglecting African agriculture and by not interfering with African production methods, the government ensured that Africans living on Crown land outside the Shire Highlands remained psychologically within the subsistence economy of tribal life and had few acute problems to become politicized. Finding money to meet tax obligations was not a serious problem. Sufficient opportunities existed for southern Africans to earn cash either by working on white estates or by attempting to grow cotton in

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32. C. Baker, "A Note on Nguru Immigration to Nyasaland," The Nyasaland Journal, 14,1 (1961), pp.41-2. The Lomwe are often referred to as Nguru.

certain districts and the incidence of labour migration from the southern region was therefore not to be as great as that from elsewhere in the Protectorate.

Migration was greatest from the central and northern regions. The problem for Africans lay in the virtual non-existence of economic opportunities. The northern region, particularly, was handicapped by poor soil, few markets and lack of local employment opportunities. In several lakeshore centres such as Karonga and Nkhota-Khota, Government officials had distributed cotton seeds and cotton production had steadily risen.<sup>33</sup> But in the interior areas to the west of the lake, little could be done without an adequate system of communications to promote African economic development. The obvious answer was to build railways but the necessary investment was large. With no known mineral deposits to exploit and the railway from Port Herald (now Nsanje) to Blantyre failing to meet its expenses, there was very little possibility for a railway extension northwards to the lake. Such an extension could only be financed out of public funds which were not then available. The causes of labour migration could not be tackled and the outflow of northern Africans grew to abnormal proportions. Though often exaggerated, the social consequences of labour migration were serious for African social systems and village communities. Men died or were disabled in the mines; women were widowed or left at home for long periods

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33. Report on the Cotton-Growing Industry - British Central Africa Protectorate by Samuel Wilson (1905).



becoming entirely dependant on their kinsfolk; and many migrants never returned.<sup>34</sup> For our immediate purpose, however, it is necessary to consider the consequences of travel abroad on the development of Nyasaland African political ideas and organization.

Professor G.A. Shepperson has argued that labour migrants from Malawi to countries to the south produced "a sort of political cross-fertilization" and that this was perhaps evident in the formation of the first secular African political organization in Malawi in 1912. There were, he argues, "enough Nyasas in South Africa in 1912 to notice the formation of the South African Native National Congress and to create, on however slender and informal a scale, a parallel organization for themselves."<sup>35</sup> Oral testimony confirms much of this argument with regard to the founding of the North Nyasa Native Association. It is claimed that when A. Simon Mhango returned home to Karonga from South Africa in 1912 with knowledge of the recently-established South African political body, it was he who, in consultation with some local Africans, suggested that a similar, but miniature, non-tribal organization be created to provide a forum for the discussion of African aspirations and grievances in that district.<sup>36</sup>

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34. Margaret Read, "Migrant Labour in Africa and Its Effects on Tribal Life," International Labour Review, 45,6 (1942), pp.605-31.

35. George A. Shepperson, "External Factors in the Development of African Nationalism with particular reference to British Central Africa," in Historians in Tropical Africa (Salisbury, 1962), p.324.

36. Interview with Isiah M. Jere, one of the founder members of the North Nyasa Native Association. See also S1/1481/19, Abraham to C.S., 24 March 1921, enclosure containing statement by A.S. Mhango dated 17 January 1921, M.N.A., Zomba.

Yet migrant workers do not appear to have influenced greatly the development of African political movements in Nyasaland. All the major political bodies formed in Nyasaland were started by Africans who had hardly been abroad. The North Nyasa Native Association was founded in 1912 because Mhango's ideas coincided at that moment with the interests of Africans resident in Karonga. Apart from a few quasi-political religious sects introduced into Nyasaland by Africans who had worked in South Africa, there was little direct influence of migrants on the creation of African political organizations in the Protectorate. Again, although there was some dissemination of radical ideas picked up from outside, these do not seem to have had much impact on African political ideology and activity in Nyasaland. Even in the 1915 Rising with its intricate chain of contacts with South Africa, the conclusion of the commission of inquiry that it did not think that "ideas disseminated by the ordinary emigrant native affected the rising"<sup>37</sup> seems to have been essentially correct. A more likely consequence of residence abroad was that it led migrants to experience the emotional force of nationalism and developed in them the sentiment of 'Nyasaland' nationality. Thousands of Malawians migrated abroad where they encountered a world which made little or no provision for their particular tribal affiliations. Their experience therefore seems to have been more nostalgic than political. But experience of European-dominated

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37. Report of the Commission...to Inquire...into the Native Rising....., 6819 (Zomba, 1916), para.17, p.6.



territories to the south did have some impact on Nyasa attitudes to their homeland which had important political consequences. Nyasas returned home with a deep antipathy to the racial policies of white societies and with increased affection for their own country with its relatively more liberal native policy. Feelings such as these not only aroused both national sentiment and pride but made Malawians determined not to permit the extension of settler-oriented situations to their own country. When European settlers throughout Central Africa advocated federation or closer union of Nyasaland with Southern Rhodesia, it was not surprising that African politicians in the Protectorate were able to mobilize widespread opposition to such schemes. By imposing federation on Nyasaland in 1953, the British Government united the African peoples of the Protectorate in a way that few other issues could have done and stimulated the creation of a full-scale, mass nationalist movement in the country.

If the "ordinary emigrant native" made very little impact on African political ideology and activity in Nyasaland, the Malawian who had studied abroad and obtained a secondary and even university education was often to become a key person in Malawi African politics. We shall refer to the political role of such persons in later chapters but may merely note here that the wider knowledge and sense of criticism possessed by an educated African enabled him to play a vital role in the leadership of a political movement, especially in a country like Malawi where the first secondary school was only started in 1940.

It would be wrong to suppose that there was only an external migration from Malawi. Within the Protectorate itself consequent upon limited employment opportunities in the northern region, many educated northerners came south to work in the commercial and administrative centres of the Shire Highlands. Many Livingstonia-trained northerners came to hold leading positions for a number of years in the Government Secretariat in Zomba. The coming together of educated Africans from all over Nyasaland to either Blantyre or Zomba was important in enabling individuals to realize their shared problems and to discuss the possibility of common action for redress. A strong national consciousness was developing among the educated elements which was to find its organizational expression in the formation, in 1944, of the Nyasaland African Congress.

An equally important and related factor in the development of African political consciousness may have been the African's collective experience not only during the first World War but also during earlier overseas service by Nyasa soldiers in the King's African Rifles in such countries as Ghana, Gambia and Somaliland.<sup>38</sup> In the 1914-18 War, small numbers were enrolled in the regular military units while the majority, between 60-70,000, were recruited as carriers and porters for the various

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38. On Nyasa military service in general, see George Shepperson, "The Military History of British Central Africa," The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal, 26 (1959), pp.23-33.



East African campaigns. They discovered the weaknesses of the white man whose prestige was lowered,<sup>39</sup> and they came into contact with peoples from neighbouring territories to a certain extent. But because the Malawi tribes were grouped into separate companies, the War may not, unlike the 1939-45 one, have made them aware of themselves as a distinct nationality in contrast to a distinct racial group. Perhaps the greatest impact of the first World War was the heavy casualties sustained by the Nyasaland servicemen. African carriers suffered large numbers of fatalities. Governor Smith's brief comment may therefore be basically correct in anticipating future African political reactions as a result of their wartime experiences. The 1914-18 War, wrote Smith, "taught the African many lessons of the white man's power and the means he commands which are denied the native of carrying on war of a character he had no previous knowledge of nor conception. The lack of organizing power in the African is also another factor."<sup>40</sup> Coupled with the abortive Native Rising of 1915, the War showed that the British were too strong to be forced. The need for non-violent and constitutional means of political action became obvious to African leaders. At the same time the importance of organized African political activity was recognized which was to be reflected in the bureaucratic forms of the inter-war Native Associations and the attempts to co-ordinate their various activities on a wider than district level.

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39. G.A. Shepperson (External Factors), op. cit., pp.324-5.

40. C.O.525/78, Smith to C.O., 18 February 1918, P.R.O., London.

The introduction of a more effective form of government relieved the missions of many of their previous problems such as those of self-defence and the complications arising from the assumption of administrative powers. The advent of the Pax Britannica led to the proliferation of missionary societies seeking to take advantage of the opportunities arising from a more settled situation in the country. A welter of new denominations entered the Protectorate before 1914 while those which were already established expanded their activities.

The growth of missions was greatest in the Shire Highlands. Most of the new organizations were small and in order to become self-supporting as quickly as possible and recoup some portion of their expenditure they entered frequently into the business of cultivating crops. The soil was most fertile in the Shire Highlands where transportation was also most developed and it was consequently here that these new missions became established. The Zambesi Industrial Mission, a non-sectarian undertaking, was the first to start in 1892 at Mitsidi near Blantyre,

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41. For an excellent discussion of some of the themes treated in this section, see K.J. McCracken, Livingstonia Mission and the evolution of Malawi, 1875-1939, Ph.D. Cambridge, 1967, Chap.5. Useful general summaries on missions and education are contained in S.S. Murray, Handbook of Nyasaland (London, 1932), Chap. 13, and C.O.525/12, Sharpe to C.O., 13 March 1906 and enclosures, P.R.O., London. A more detailed discussion is contained in R.J. Macdonald, A History of African Education in Nyasaland 1875-1945, Ph.D. Edinburgh, 1969, Chaps.1-3.



and was soon cultivating large plantations and by 1906 exporting much coffee and cotton. A year later, in 1893, the Nyasaland Industrial Mission was founded at Likabula, three miles north-west of Blantyre, and it opened a second station at Cholo in 1895. Around the turn of the century was started the South African General Mission at Lulwe in the extreme south-west of the Lower Shire district but this was closed in 1914 owing to the dispersal of local Africans because of famine. In 1909, however, a second station had been established at Chididi, near Port Herald (now Nsanje). Another mission that commenced work was that of the Seventh-day Adventists which appeared in 1902, one of a number of further small sects introduced by one Joseph Booth whose activities will be the subject of some discussion in the next chapter.

Christianity thus came into Malawi in many different guises. The character of missionary work differed considerably according to the background and denomination of the societies concerned, and this had, as we shall suggest, a differing impact on the acquisition of political skills among their adherents.

The longer-established bodies continued to play the major role in Malawi. The financial resources of these larger missions were far beyond those of the newer societies. Up to the outbreak of World War 1, the Livingstonia Mission was the most successful of these larger and older societies. Backed by wealthy Scottish interests, it employed the largest European staff; had the most

stations manned by white clergy; and was the first mission to start a college for higher education in the Protectorate. In 1895 was founded the Overtoun Institution (named in recognition of a contribution of £5,000 by Lord Overtoun) at Khondowe near Mount Waller in the northern extreme of Malawi, seven miles west of the lake. This was nearly fifteen years before the Blantyre Mission could raise the necessary funds to start work on the Henry Henderson Institute. But even the schools and stations of the Blantyre, Dutch Reformed and Anglican missionaries far outnumbered those of the smaller denominations so that the emergent African elite was to be essentially the product of the larger and older missionary societies. Lacking any large financial backing, the smaller missions were incapable of having much impact on African societies. Few of their staff also possessed more than an elementary education and, anyway, most of their time was devoted to the cultivation of plantations than on the building up of a series of schools. Indeed, they used agricultural training as a means of introducing the Gospel.<sup>42</sup>

Within the larger mission societies, further differences existed to make Livingstonia and Blantyre play the major missionary role in Malawi especially as far as the development of modern African politics was

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42. Michael Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers (London, 1964), pp.79-81.



concerned. It was not only financial backing which determined this influence but the basic philosophy of the type of society these two missions wished to create.<sup>43</sup> Both of the Scottish missions, and particularly Livingstonia up to 1914, were sources of innovation in traditional African life. Both sought to revolutionize African societies and to transform them by exposing them to facets of modern life. Both provided higher educational and industrial training as well as normal religious instruction. By 1914 they had built up an elaborate network of elementary village schools from which pupils proceeded to attend a central school at the various stations for instruction up to Standard three. Thereafter, a small percentage of students were sent to the headquarters station of each mission to receive higher education. Here they could study to Standard six, the highest primary level, and a few could proceed further to the more advanced Normal Arts, Theology and Commercial courses to be trained as teachers, clerks, ministers of religion, storekeepers, telegraphists, etc., Moreover, students could bind themselves to learn a trade in the industrial departments of the mission such as printing, carpentry and engineering.

These colleges were places where the best African

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43. K.J. McCracken in Religion in Africa, op. cit.; A.C. Ross, "The Foundations of the Blantyre Mission, Nyasaland," in ibid., pp.97-113; George A. Shepperson, (External Factors), op. cit., pp.320-22 for a brief discussion of Scottish influences in Nyasaland generally.

pupils were given both a literary education in English as well as industrial training. Here the most successful students were brought together for training that could last several years in a non-tribal environment, thus promoting the creation of a close-knit intelligentsia with a unity of focus beyond the barriers of kin and tribe. Practically all the significant African political leaders of Nyasaland were educated at these two colleges where European missionaries not only helped to introduce Africans to the modern world but, perhaps unwittingly, inspired in them the capacity to evaluate and challenge those features of the colonial situation that antagonized them. Christianity equipped them with powerful weapons with which to challenge white pretensions of superiority. Unrestricted access to the Bible with all its notions of equality and non-racialism, provided a valid weapon which the new African elite was to employ in its conflicts with various European communities. It was these acculturated Africans who as "self-conscious young men in collars"<sup>44</sup> were able to nurse the ambition for self-expression and who became the leaders and organizers of the various African political groups through which they criticized aspects of the character of colonial rule and called in question the actions and attitudes of both white settlers and missionaries. In many of these political activities, the new literates were guided by the often outspoken criticisms of government policy

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44. H.L. Duff, African Small Chop (London, 1932), p.14.



and white planters which appeared in the widely-read local Scottish mission journals, notably those which were published before 1920. One example, and the most popular one, will suffice to illustrate this point. The Rev. David Clement Scott's fervent objections to the possibility of the Protectorate coming under the control of the British South Africa Company during the early 1890s, made many Africans who read about his arguments in the Blantyre Mission journals, Kalilole and Life and Work in British Central Africa,<sup>45</sup> very suspicious of the intentions of white politicians in Southern Rhodesia. During their bitter campaigns against federation in the early 1950s, educated Africans were to cite Scott's objections to closer relationship with Southern Rhodesia and its anti-native policy in support of their own case against such a union.<sup>46</sup>

In extreme contrast to the two Scottish missions, the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (U.M.C.A.) and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (D.R.C.M.) which

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45. G.A. Shepperson (External Factors), *op. cit.*, p.321. See also F.O.2/54, Johnston to Sir Villiers Lister, 4 June 1893, P.R.O., London, in which he shows his concern about criticisms of his administration by the Blantyre missionaries. As these criticisms were printed in the local mission news-sheet, Kalilole, and as that newspaper was published in Chiyao and Chinyanja, many Africans could thus become acquainted with the missionary viewpoints and this is what Johnston was concerned about.

46. At an emergency conference of chiefs and Congress leaders held at Blantyre on 17 August 1952, Rev. Jackson Mboga related how the Rev. Archibald Scott had told Africans about 1892 about attempts by Cecil Rhodes to take over Nyasaland and how the missionaries had resisted such moves. Further examples can be found in the African nationalist newspaper, Kwaca.

operated mainly in the central region and the adjoining Islamicized lakeshore area including Yaoland, sought to impart Christianity with as little social disturbance as possible. Their declared purpose was not to cut Africans off from their tribal bonds; at the most, they wanted to provide just that training which Africans could later put to practical use in their village communities. Whereas the Scottish missionaries saw their functions in terms of the steam engine and the Bible, the U.M.C.A. missionaries saw theirs in fairly exclusive religious terms. Their work was chiefly religious and involved the provision of little industrial training. Indeed, with their public school and Oxford and Cambridge backgrounds they were not likely to be as inclined as their Scottish colleagues, from generally lower middle-class families and artisan stock, to propagate the values of the industrial society and state. They even attempted to adjust their own modes of living to those of the African societies within which they operated by living a life of spartan simplicity. The houses they inhabited were constructed of reeds and bamboos and they partook of African food. One impressive result of such a philosophy was that African institutions were treated with great respect and understanding and Africans were frequently and relatively quickly promoted to positions of responsibility within the mission.<sup>47</sup>

The Dutch Reformed missionaries were predominantly

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47. A neat summary of the philosophy of the U.M.C.A. is contained in H. Alan C. Cairns, Prelude to Imperialism (London, 1965), pp.218-21.



of rural stock and held as their guiding slogan 'The Bible and the Plough'. As the late J.L. Pretorius wrote, "At the heart of the story of the D.R.C.M. lies its aim; A Bible-loving, industrious and prosperous peasantry."<sup>48</sup> They played down the industrial and European element by emphasizing agricultural training and simple village industries and placed special stress on the evangelical side of mission work.<sup>49</sup> Although a very large number of elementary schools were established, secondary-type education was resisted and English only introduced into the training school for teachers at Mvera in 1904 after much intense pressure by African pupils. Yet if English was taught as a subject, the chief medium of instruction in the primary as well as in the training schools continued to be in the vernacular.<sup>50</sup> As a result, of all missions, the Dutch Reformed was the most conservative and slow in its devolution of authority to Africans. Not till late 1925 were the first two African evangelists ordained.

The Roman Catholics had two orders in the Protectorate, the White Fathers in the north and the Montfort Marist Fathers in the south. They, too, did not provide the sort of education that fostered political

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48. J.L. Pretorius, "The Story of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Nyasaland," The Nyasaland Journal, 10,1 (1957), p.11.

49. R.I. Codrington, "The Central Angoniland District of the British Central Africa Protectorate," The Geographical Journal, 11,5 (1898), p.511; Thomas Jesse Jones, Education in East Africa: A Study of East, Central and South Africa (New York, 1925), p.212; M.W. Retief, op. cit., pp.79, 136.

50. M.W. Retief, op. cit., pp.82, 84.

skills. Handicrafts and technical training in the vernacular was preferred to the more literary curriculum involving the use of the English language and little attention was given to Bible readings.<sup>51</sup>

The ramifications of such divergent educational and evangelical policies were to be important in the creation of an African elite. Whereas Africans emerging from Livingstonia and Blantyre were to secure the best-paid jobs and represent all the main sources of political awareness in Malawi, their counterparts in the central region and Lower and Upper Shire districts were to be less thoroughly involved in the new ways of life and less equipped with the skills to proceed to positions of responsibility both in civilian and political life. In consequence, modern political groups were to appear late in the central region. When they did appear, they were led and controlled by returning migrants who had been trained at one of the Scottish missions and who were sometimes alien to the region. With the departure of these leaders, either to another region or to resume work outside Malawi, the political groups declined quickly and few educated elements remained to ensure their continued operation. Similarly, the failure of Blantyre (and also Livingstonia at an earlier date) to penetrate Yao land effectively and the inability of the U.M.C.A. and D.R.C.M.

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51. For statements by Roman Catholic missionaries on their philosophy and activities in Malawi, see their evidence to the 1915 Rising Commission, op. cit., For an African view on the Catholics, see George Simeon Mwase, Strike A Blow And Die (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), pp.64-5.



to make much headway along the lower half of the lake south of Nkhota-Khota, meant that there were few Muslim Yao literates here in touch with the 'new' world to start up modern vehicles of protest. Some Muslim Yao did send their children to local mission schools but soon stopped doing so as their children became Christians. Preferring piety to the western form of literacy, the Macinga and Masaninga Yao decided to have their children unlettered and Muslim rather than have them turned into literate infidels. As a result, these Yao peoples were unable to break out of the old traditions and to move significantly into new sorts of opposition and political activity. It was to be left to the immigrant Christian Lomwe and Africans from other districts to start the first political movements in Yaoland but these were, for many years, to be on the fringe of traditional-type Yao politics.

In connexion with this it is of interest to observe briefly that there were frequent fears up to 1918 that Islam would be the major source of local opposition to British rule and western influence. Islam was able to present itself, though an immigrant religion, as an African religion, whereas Christianity was always looked upon as 'the white man's religion' and therefore the religion of the colonial oppressors. Islam was for the most part propagated by Africans, Christianity by whites.<sup>52</sup>

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52. A.L. Hofmeyr, "Islam in Nyasaland," The Muslim World, 2,1 (1912), pp.6-7.

Islam, too, was better adapted to African society. In conversion it did not make the same initial heavy demands as the Christian missionary who often sought complete abandonment of the convert's old religion. A man could become a Muslim without needing to understand all the teachings of his new faith.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, with a history of anti-European resistance by the Yao and Arabs, the colonial government was often apprehensive during the early decades that Muslim penetration into the Protectorate might once again provoke rebellion on the part of a people perhaps still smarting from the overthrow of their traditional profitable way of life. Warnings about Islamic aggression abounded up to 1918 but nothing came of these fears. Islam proved negative in its response to the new European order and did not come to be regarded by the new, aspiring Africans as a culture with the same attractions as the civilization of the Christian Europeans.<sup>54</sup>

Education was wholly the preserve of the missionary societies and most of the burden of work in the medical field was also carried by them. Apart from concerning itself with the maintenance of law and order the government was mainly engrossed with economic matters. It provided an annual grant-in-aid of £1,000 for education which had to be allocated among the numerous mission schools but considering the number of schools and pupils

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53. C.O.525/78, Smith to C.O., 18 February 1918, P.R.O., London.

54. G. Shepperson and T. Price, Independent African (Edinburgh, 1958), pp.183-4, 405-8.



enrolled this amounted to only token support. For all that, the development of a western form of education was a major occurrence of these early colonial years and the Christian missions had by 1914 managed to place an elementary education within the reach of nearly the entire population. Nevertheless, African tribal cultures as a whole were comparatively slightly affected by missionary endeavours. With their generally slender resources and broad base of activities, the missionaries were able to produce only limited results and the large mass of Africans continued to live in their tribal environment. Missionary teaching, however, did lead to the creation of a small, newly literate elite from which the leaders of modern African politics were to emerge.<sup>55</sup>

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55. For a good general discussion of the early impact of missionaries, see Lewis Gann, The Birth of a Plural Society (Manchester, 1958), Chap. 2. Although this study relates to Zambia, it offers useful insights into the early Malawi situation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Politics of Early Independent African Churches

#### Joseph Booth and John Chilembwe<sup>1</sup>

On August 11, 1892, there arrived in the growing commercial and missionary centre of Blantyre, a British missionary by the name of Joseph Booth. A radical and independent-minded fundamentalist, Booth had great ideas of founding a series of self-propagating industrial missions of the Baptist faith in Malawi. His early ventures in the Protectorate led to the establishment in 1892 of the Zambesi Industrial Mission (Z.I.M.) at Mitsidi near Blantyre; the founding in 1894 of the Nyasaland Industrial Mission a few miles north of Blantyre; and the setting up of the Baptist Industrial Mission of Scotland the following year at Gowa in Southern Ngoniland. In the Shire Highlands, Booth's early evangelical efforts brought him into immediate disfavour with both the local Blantyre missionaries and the secular European coffee planters. By commencing his work in the vicinity of Blantyre, primarily through force of circumstances, Booth incurred the wrath of the Scottish missionaries who condemned him for prosyletizing among their hard-won converts and who repeatedly remonstrated with him to move elsewhere. By paying much higher wages

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1. This section is based almost entirely on George Shepperson and Thomas Price's monumental work, Independent African (Edinburgh, 1958), pp.3-147.



to his African workers (about 18s. against 3s. a month), Booth naturally came to be abused by white planters who also resented his preaching and teaching of highly egalitarian and radical ideas to the local indigenous peoples. Notwithstanding such criticisms and pressures, Booth remained in the Shire Highlands and his Z.I.M. in particular began to become firmly established. To the chagrin of the Scottish missionaries, he began enticing some of their African workers and catchment by offering them either higher wages or easier admission to the church (following speedier baptism in contrast to the long preparatory period demanded by the Blantyre Mission). Condemnation was heaped upon Booth by missionary and planter alike and friction with governmental agents was also not absent. But for a small band of Africans who had begun to come into contact with him, Booth's sympathetic attitudes and ideas were to become revered and respected and to set in motion an intricate chain of circumstances and African political reactions which were to reach their fateful climax in the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915.

Among the Africans who joined Booth's Z.I.M. was John Chilembwe, the moving spirit behind the abortive 1915 Rising against British colonial authority. Said to be the son of a Masaninga Yao father and Manganja (or Nyanja) mother, Chilembwe was born at Sanganu near Chiradzulu probably between 1870 and 1871. After briefly attending one of the Blantyre Mission out-schools at Chilomoni, he was taken on as Booth's house-servant in 1892 and became the first convert of the Z.I.M. in the

following year. He proved to be a most reliable and trusted servant and in other ways became a faithful companion, friend and guide of the Booth family.<sup>2</sup> By joining Booth's household and mission, and by becoming so closely associated with Booth, Chilembwe was to become acquainted and perhaps infused with the missionary's religious-radical ideas and highly egalitarian feelings. An example of this growing pro-African spirit was contained in the independent African missionary organization which was started in 1897, though it never went beyond a paper venture. Chilembwe was associated with Booth in the formation of the 'African Christian Union of Nyasaland' which, in its manifesto, called for equal rights for Africans as well as Europeans and which declared as its guiding policy the militant aim of 'Africa for the African'. The aims of this organization probably summarized the major radical ideas that Chilembwe had picked up in the course of his five years apprenticeship with Booth before they left together for the United States in 1897. Here Booth hoped to raise funds for his various industrial mission schemes and also further Chilembwe's education.

In America, Chilembwe was plunged into a milieu intensely hostile to the black man and he must certainly have experienced many of the unfortunate inconveniences of negrophobia of the time. His two to three years stay

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2. Emily Booth Langworthy, This Africa was Mine (Stirling, 1952), pp.39-41, 134, etc.,



in the United States, after he had amicably parted company with Booth, coincided with a period of growing political and social discrimination against the American Negro with its attendant race violence, lynchings and tension. It was also a period of intense Negro reaction and Chilembwe must have come into contact with the various Negro churches which constituted one of the major channels for the black man's struggle to ameliorate the conditions of the suffering coloured American. From them Chilembwe could derive ideas and lessons for his own independent African church which he was to found on his return to Nyasaland. The zealous approach of the American Negro cause must have enhanced the radical ideas he had picked up from Booth and these must have been further reinforced during the two years that he studied at the Virginia Theological Seminary and College, a small Baptist institution at Lynchburg, Virginia, the principal of which was a militantly independent Negro named Gregory Hayes. In late 1899 Chilembwe returned home to Malawi with a fair education and as an ordained minister "to labour amongst his benighted race."<sup>3</sup>

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3. These are Chilembwe's own words contained in a letter written by him to the Central African Times, 8 December 1900, p.10. In his evidence to the Commission which enquired into the 1915 Rising, George Prentice, a Livingstonia missionary, stated: "I think it was in the Autumn of 1899 that I travelled out in the same steamer as the native I believe to have been John Chilembwe. He was then on his way back from America." (C.O.525/66, Smith to C.O., 7 February 1916, enclosure No.D, evidence dated 10 July 1915, P.R.O., London.) This very valuable source will hereafter be referred to as 1915 Commission Evidence.

Backed financially by the National Baptist

Convention of America, an important Negro organization, Chilembwe acquired 93 acres of land at Mbombwe in the Chiradzulu district and started his Providence Industrial Mission (P.I.M.) in February 1900.<sup>4</sup> It aimed at being another self-propagating industrial mission following the pattern of those set up by Booth during the 1890s. With the help of two American Negroes sent out to assist him till 1906, and through the support of small but regular funds from his American backers, the P.I.M. was slowly transformed from very poor and modest beginnings into a fairly large station with congregations extending not only throughout the Chiradzulu area but also into the neighbouring district of Mlanje and, to a smaller extent, into Mozambique. A string of independent African schools was established at which rudimentary English was taught with the simple curriculum including basic agricultural training which emphasized its essentially practical nature. In addition to teaching and proselytizing, experiments in coffee, tea and cotton were conducted though they were not entirely successful.<sup>5</sup> Weekly sewing classes for women were also launched which helped to build up the pride and corporate spirit of the little mission community. By the end of the first decade of its

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4. S2/22/34, Chilembwe to Resident, Chiradzulu, 12 January 1914, M.N.A., Zomba. The title deed of the Mbombwe estate is dated 5 March 1901.

5. See extract of a letter by "E.N. Check" (Rev. L.N. Cheek) reprinted from the Richmond Planet in the Central African Times, 2 September 1905, p.4.



existence, a clean, neatly-attired community with industrious and sober habits along European lines had been created at the P.I.M. In the face of much local white suspicion, initial problems of acquiring land and continuous economic difficulties, the mission had managed to struggle along, though it was still based on small foundations.

In 1905 there was reproduced in the local newspaper part of a letter to an American journal by one of Chilembwe's Negro helpers at the P.I.M. - one Rev. L.N. Cheek. To some extent it contained a veiled criticism of conditions prevailing for Africans in the British Protectorate:

"...When the village hut life is broken up and the Government will run schools with some of the tax-money used for standing armies and Imperialism, we can hope for a great change. Will we really hope for this change from any other race? Can we expect the foreigners in Africa to plead for higher wages and more education while they can still barter goods to natives and get the majority of them for seventy-five cents per month? - Yours for humanity, E.N. Cheek." <sup>6</sup>

This letter raises the question of how far these criticisms were representative of Chilembwe's own feelings and whether during the period 1900 to 1912 he was himself criticizing aspects of the white man's rule and even considering armed revolt. There can be no doubt that he was not planning any rebellion during these years. Certainly he was using his churches and schools as forums for the ventilation of African grievances, though his

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6. ibid.,

criticisms were most probably couched in Biblical phrases. Criticism of the state of African land rights and the conditions prevailing on the A. Livingstone Bruce estates, which adjoined the P.I.M., were openly voiced. Indeed, as the largest and best organized African church sited near one of the most important European estates in the Shire Highlands, the P.I.M. readily became a natural nucleus for African agitation. No mission work was allowed to be carried on and schools permitted to be opened on the Bruce estates, and there was consequently no other possible guardian and spokesman for Africans resident on these lands than John Chilembwe. For the Rev. Harry Matecheta of the Blantyre Mission, this was a factor of major importance in the emergence of agitational politics at the P.I.M. In his evidence to the Commission which enquired into the 1915 Rising, he maintained that "if many schools of the other Missions were allowed in the Estate they would have saved the lives of these gentlemen, for the natives would not have gone to John at all."<sup>7</sup> As it was, many of the tenants and workers on the Bruce plantations were members of Chilembwe's flock and they and others would naturally bring their complaints to him for airing and investigation. Yet Chilembwe's criticisms before 1912 were not subversive and were kept within legal bounds. There is no evidence available to suggest that any political militancy was evolving in his mind before that year and that there was any likelihood of him

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7. 1915 Commission Evidence: Rev. Harry Kambwiri (Matecheta) dated 13 July 1915.



subverting colonial rule.

The main political threat to white rule seemed to come from religious movements inspired by Joseph Booth both on his return to the Protectorate from the United States in 1898 as well as after his departure from Malawi for ever in 1902. After amicably parting company with Chilembwe, Booth had come into contact with an American sect, the Seventh Day Baptists of Plainfield, New Jersey, and had been appointed its agent in Malawi where he founded a body calling itself 'The Sabbath Evangelizing and Industrial Association.' Another industrial-type mission, it was started at a station called Plainfield (known from 1907 as Malamulo), thirty miles south of Blantyre in the Cholo district of the Shire Highlands. But before concerning himself with his new mission, the volatile Booth drew up in 1899, and began circulating for the signature of Africans, a petition to Queen Victoria which called for a "Native policy more in keeping with the Commandments of God than the present." Published in the local newspaper, the petition called inter alia for the entire proceeds of the African hut tax to be devoted to financing African education; that free higher education be provided for not less than five per cent. of the African population; and that the Protectorate should revert to African ownership after twenty-one years. The colonial government acted swiftly and Commissioner Sharpe demanded that the petition be revoked immediately or Booth would be deported.<sup>8</sup> The latter evaded arrest and

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8. F.O.2/209, Sharpe to F.O., 5 August 1899, and F.O.2/210, Sharpe to F.O., 5 September 1899, P.R.O., London.

fled to Chikwawa where he told enthusiastic African gatherings that Queen Victoria had sent him to tell them not to pay any more hut tax.<sup>9</sup> Eventually Booth slipped into Mozambique and was only allowed to return to the Protectorate on his abandoning the petition and agreeing not to engage in any further political activity.<sup>10</sup>

In giving this undertaking, Booth made an interesting statement which may provide some indication as to why he agreed to give up his petition so easily, though it was not to influence him in putting a stop to his political propaganda among Africans. "Candour compels me" he wrote to Sharpe, "to confess that after making a test for a short time of the Native Africans ability or desire to attempt something beyond, I have reached the conclusion that the Negro of this part of the world has not attained a maturity of character fitting him for such effort. It has however been a satisfaction to me to have placed on record, before both races, what I had to say."<sup>11</sup>

Booth resumed his evangelical activities which also included cultivating cotton for the support of his new mission. A local blight on the crop, however, led to costly failure which combined with some of his schemes resulting in the accumulation of large debts and the fact that he was incessantly quarrelling with a fellow

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9. J2/9/2, telegram from the Collector, Chikwawa dated 17 August 1899, M.N.A., Zomba.

10. F.O.2/210, Pearce to F.O., 22 September 1899, and F.O. 2/305, Sharpe to F.O., 2 February 1900, P.R.O., London.

11. F.O.2/305, Sharpe to F.O., 2 February 1900, enclosure No.2, Booth to Sharpe, 21 January 1900, P.R.O., London.



missionary sent out to assist him, culminated in the Seventh Day Baptists terminating their contract with Booth in late 1901. With characteristic persuasiveness, Booth soon gained the backing of another American sect, the Seventh-day Adventists, who acquired title to the Plainfield mission site. But when an American Negro was sent out to help him, Booth once again broke with his fellow missionary. As a result of these personal difficulties, and his being accused by the government of preaching seditious doctrines amongst Africans, Booth left the Protectorate for ever in 1902 and settled in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

That official accusations of Booth's teachings being seditious were not without foundation can be seen clearly from several contemporary statements by educated Africans. It was very apparent to them that Booth's teaching was "against his own countryman's preaching." Africans were very careful to note his denunciation of the Blantyre missionaries as hypocrites and his condemnation of them as land grabbers. According to an African follower of the Scottish mission, Booth admonished the missionaries for "Using the natives as hoes" while "they themselves getting a lot of money." That Booth's pacifist ideals may have been misinterpreted for more violent activity can be seen from the following African recollection of Booth's ideas: "'Rise up and save your

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12. See GOA 2/4/14, Sharpe to C.O., 15 May 1909, M.N.A., Zomba, for an attempt by Booth to re-enter the Protectorate which was not permitted by the colonial government.

country' was the sentence he almost said every time we met him." There can be no doubt that Booth's propaganda among Africans of the southern region was highly unsettling, perhaps even actively seditious, and certainly one that no colonial government could tolerate for long.<sup>13</sup>

Elliot Kamwana and Charles Domingo<sup>14</sup>

Booth did not long maintain his connexions with the Seventh-day Adventists. In 1906, after much wandering around, he turned to another American source of support to finance his missionary schemes in Africa: the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, forerunner of the modern Jehovah's Witnesses. Followers of Pastor Charles Taze Russell, the Watch Tower adherents believed in the Millennium, in the Second Coming, when the dead would be recreated and the worthy would inherit the new kingdom, the remainder relapsing into annihilation. Russell projected that the Second Advent would come about 1915 when all unrepentant souls would meet death while the followers of Watch Tower, the elect, would be saved and accepted into the New Jerusalem. On returning to South Africa from the United States in 1907, Booth commenced

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13. 1915 Commission Evidence: written evidence of M.M. Chisuse of the Church of Scotland Mission, Blantyre, n.d. See also J2/9/2, M.N.A., Zomba, in which it is reported that in September 1900 Booth was inciting Africans in Cholo not to pay their hut taxes.

14. Once again my researches on the subjects of this section have been unable to add very much to the analysis provided by G. Shepperson and T. Price, op. cit., pp.147-65.



the preaching of Russell's millenarian ideas, claiming that the new age would come in October 1914. In South Africa he came into contact with a number of Malawi migrants, one of whom, Elliot Kamwana, was to return home to spread the new gospel.<sup>15</sup>

Elliot Kenan Kamwana Chirwa<sup>16</sup> was a Tonga from Chipera village near Bandawe who had been educated at the Bandawe mission and had briefly attended the Overtoun Institution from which he had suddenly departed in 1901 for reasons which are not clear.<sup>17</sup> Some attribute the reason for his break with Livingstonia to the introduction of school fees which he or his parents objected paying; others suggest that he was suspended because of immorality; while others point to his dissatisfaction with missionary teachings.<sup>18</sup> Whatever the reason, Kamwana drifted to the Shire Highlands where he met Booth at the Plainfield mission being subsequently baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist faith in 1902. In

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15. George Shepperson, "Nyasaland and the Millennium," in Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed., Millennial Dreams in Action (The Hague, 1962), pp. 144-151.

16. I have found useful two unpublished biographies on Kamwana by two leading Tonga historians, J.C.W. Malifa and Hanoek Ng'oma, which were kindly made available to me by the authors.

17. See Overtoun Missionary Institution Boys Register, Vol. 1, entry No. 234, Church of Scotland Office, Edinburgh, in which "Kenan Kamwana Aphiri" is reported to have entered the Institution in March 1898 but to have "remained at home after the vacation."

18. Interviews with and biographies by J.C.W. Malifa and H. Ng'oma; N.O. Moore and Wayland D. Wilcox, "The Report of the Visit to South and Central Africa," The Sabbath Recorder, 25 November 1912, p. 719.

that year he moved down to South Africa where, like many of his fellow Tonga, he worked in the mines and became acquainted with the various independent African religious sects that were springing up in that country and which were serving, like those in America, as a type of safety valve in a tense racial situation. Sometime in 1907, Kamwana became reacquainted with Booth in Cape Town and stayed with him for about six months during which time he received instruction in Watch Tower teachings. Then, in late 1908, he returned home to Tongaland as an evangelist to preach the new doctrine of the Millennium in an already disturbed social situation.

As we noticed in the previous chapter, the superior financial resources and relatively revolutionary attitudes of the Livingstonia Mission had conspired to make its sphere in northern Malawi the most advanced region educationally in the Protectorate. Of all the northern districts it was Tongaland that had the greatest educational development. In neighbouring Ngoniland, too, a number of important centres of work had been established and educational developments were proceeding quite rapidly. But Livingstonia's religious policy was proving incompatible with the educational advances engendered by the mission and it was constituting a major source of friction between Africans and the missionaries. Kamwana's movement was to provide a means of partly resolving these



missionary-inspired African grievances.<sup>19</sup>

Despite their enthusiastic response to missionary teaching, the Tonga had been initially reluctant to undergo religious conversion and only in 1889 did their first converts appear. Similarly, in Northern Ngoniland, there were only eleven converts as late as 1892. From the mid-1890s, however, the educational advance in northern Malawi, and particularly in Tongaland, began to be accompanied by a dramatic spread of evangelical Christianity. Arising from significant improvements in missionary techniques (such as preaching in the vernacular) and from the encouragement of new revivalistic methods by a younger generation of missionaries at a time when British administrative control was becoming established, there spread among the Tonga and Ngoni peoples a highly popular religious fervour. From 1895 onwards, thousands flocked to church services and large numbers sought baptism and the status of church membership. The accompanying missionary response, however, was slow and cautious.

In spite of their aim to revolutionize the social and economic conditions of African societies, and despite their adoption of popular religious methods, the

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19. For a detailed discussion of the relations between the Livingstonia Mission and the origins of the Watch Tower movement, see K.J. McCracken, Livingstonia Mission and the evolution of Malawi, 1875-1939, Ph.D. Cambridge, 1967, Chap.6. See also his chapter on twentieth century politics in Malawi in T.O. Ranger, ed., Aspects of Central African History (London, 1968), pp.192-5. Another good detailed examination of Elliot Kamwana and the introduction of Watch Tower is contained in Hans-Jürgen Greschat, Kitawala (Marburg, 1967), Part 1, pp.1-42.

Livingstonia missionaries were opposed to mass and instantaneous conversion. They decided that baptism would only be granted to those who had undergone a few years of religious instruction and whose characters had been fully approved. Regular catechismal classes were organized and minimum periods, measured in years, were prescribed for pre-baptismal instruction.<sup>20</sup> The spread of the popular religious movement had also introduced a host of administrative problems which aggravated African frustration at the length of time involved in acquiring church membership. Hitherto missionaries had been able to know and teach personally every aspiring African member but this now became impossible. With such vast numbers seeking baptism, and European missionaries being the only ones permitted to baptise, long and irritating delays ensued. Without direct personal knowledge and supervision of the candidates, the tests themselves were made more rigorous and African discontent mounted especially as the majority of applicants were rejected.

Although the religious enthusiasm died down for a

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20. See the minutes of the Presbytery of North Livingstonia dated 2 November 1900 which state that the following recommendation was approved: "That, as a general rule, baptism be not granted unless the candidate has been under definite religious instruction throughout a period of at least two years, during which the missionary has had means of ascertaining as to his life and character; and that the instruction should include, as a minimum, a course of teaching on the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Sacraments, and the Apostles' Creed, with the relative passages of Scripture." (Livingstonia Mission Archives, Livingstonia Malawi.)



short while, the revival recommenced in 1903 with vast numbers seeking entry into the Church but continuing to remain frustrated by the long preparatory period and other impediments placed in the path of baptism. But even among some of the church members themselves tensions were to be found. As elsewhere in colonial Africa, African and European Christians came into conflict over African customs and institutions. White missionaries held that polygamy constituted the main barrier to the acceptance of the gospel; that certain forms of initiation ceremonies were obscene and that various forms of dancing were licentious. African church members generally accepted such criticisms but were reluctant to condemn all their traditional customs outright believing that some of them served essential purposes in African social life. Of all these African customs it was perhaps polygamy which came to be regarded as the most directly antithetical to the missionary ideal. Undiluted monogamous marriage as advocated by the missionaries encountered serious African opposition and there were many cases of African Christians being thrown out of the Church for having taken a second wife. A prominent example of such banishment was the case of Levi Z. Mumba, the leading African politician during the inter-war period, who was an elder in the Church until he was asked to leave for marrying a second wife in 1911. Although he was not to be involved immediately in any independent African church activity in opposition to the Livingstonia Mission, he was to assist in the formation of the African National

Church in 1929, one of the beliefs of which Mumba cited in a letter to another proto-nationalist politician.

"That the commission of the Christian Church to Africa was to impart Christ and education in such a way as to fit in with the manners and customs of the people, and not that it should impose on the Africans the unnecessary and impracticable methods of European countries, such as having one wife etc., which have no biblical authority. The members of this church shall be people of good character according to native traditions, laws and customs as contained in the first five books of the Christian Bible, whether polygamists or not, etc.," 21

A second source of incipient conflict arose from Livingstonia's caution in conferring authority on Africans and placing them in positions of responsibility. Africans completing their theological training and being licensed to preach had their ordinations delayed and postponed several times. Only in 1914, over a decade after they had completed their courses, did the first three ordinands emerge. In the case of Charles Domingo, as we shall see, this delay was to be a major reason for his leaving the Livingstonia Mission and setting up his own independent African church. Even his colleague and close friend, Yesaya Z. Mwase, who was one of the first ordinands in 1914, was extremely concerned about the long delay in his ordination after being licensed to preach in 1906. At the same time, Mwase demonstrated the resentment among some educated Africans at the privileges enjoyed by white missionaries which were not also available to

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21. L.Z. Mumba to C.J. Matinga (n.d. but 1930). This letter was kindly shown to me by C.T. Mwalwanda, a student at Chancellor College, University of Malawi.



to Africans. From September 1906 to 1907 Mwase volunteered for work as a licentiate preacher at Serenje in northern Zambia but refused to return there the following year unless provided with porters and a machila (hammock) for the journey as was the case with all Europeans working for the mission. As a result he was either suspended for some time for disobedience or "left Mission service" voluntarily. In the following year, however, he seems to have been partially restored to assist the general missionary assault against 'Kamwanaism'.<sup>22</sup>

It was to such a situation of mass and elite African frustration, arising from social and religious tensions, that Kamwana returned in 1908 with a gospel offering immediate baptism and opportunities for African leadership in an independent African church. To his doctrine of the Millennium Kamwana added the question of the hut tax. The 1901 increase with its hated labour rebate had already produced much African criticism and discontent throughout the Protectorate. Among the lake-side Tonga in 1902, a mass demonstration had been organized outside the Nkhata Bay Boma in opposition to the new tax regulations and a company of the King's African Rifles had been dispatched to restore order.<sup>23</sup> It

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22. Interviews with J.C.W. Malifa and H. Ng'oma, and Overtoun Missionary Institution Boys Register, Vol.1, entry No.188, Church of Scotland office, Edinburgh.

23. F.O.2/605, Sharpe to Hill, 3 April 1902 and enclosure. See also F.O.2/606, Sharpe to F.O., 19 May 1902, enclosure No.1, Annual Report for the British Central Africa Protectorate for 1901-02, P.R.O., London.

was therefore not surprising that by preaching the abolition of the hut tax at the time of the coming in October 1914 of the new age, Kamwana was able to attract further African support for his movement.

It appears that Kamwana spent about three months at Booth's old Seventh Day Baptist station at Shiloh before going up to Tongaland in December 1908. At Shiloh he seems to have preached both the Watch Tower message and the Seventh-day Sabbath because although Booth had turned to Russell's writings he had remained loyal to some sabbatarian doctrines.<sup>24</sup> Here in the Shire Highlands, Kamwana may have come into contact with Chilembwe before he proceeded north having, for some reason, now rejected the Sabbath and holding certain modified Watch Tower ideas.

The response to Kamwana's apocalyptic and revolutionary preaching was dramatic. Using total immersion baptismal ceremonies, he is said to have baptized 9126 persons before he was arrested and deported from Tongaland in March 1909.<sup>25</sup> According to a Livingstonia missionary, Kamwana, shortly after his arrival in Tongaland, had undertaken a tour of "the whole district talking cautiously with the people, carefully noting their desires and any dissatisfaction that existed among them, and so getting a grip of the situation." Kamwana,

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24. 1915 Commission Evidence: E. Kamwana dated 15 July 1915. See also N.O. Moore and W.D. Wilcox, op. cit., p.719, and N. Olney Moore, Seventh Day Baptists and Missionary Work in Nyasaland, Africa (Chicago, 1950), p.14.

25. The figure, 9126, is cited in the unpublished work on Kamwana by J.C.W. Malifa and also in H-J. Greschat, op. cit., p.15.



the missionary continued, "was a strategist and struck the weak points of the situation very cleverly." In the first place he "found an intense desire for baptism and some discontent because the Church insisted on a course of instruction before baptizing, and baptized only those who gave evidence of a change of heart. This desire he sought to inflame by directly or indirectly conveying to the people the impression that the one thing needful was baptism." Missionary demands for the payment of educational fees "gave Kamwana his second point of vantage, a point he was not slow to make the most of. 'You are poor; the white man ought to educate you free, and give you books and even clothes; he ought not to take anything from you, he is robbing you.'" An admixture of the elements of the doctrine of the Millennium and some of his own radical ideas regarding African independence were offered by Kamwana as a solution to the abuses and frustrations suffered by Africans in a colonial situation. Pointing to the Residency on the hill he is said to have declared: "These people there you soon will see no more; for the Government will go." He preached in open-air meetings of the coming in October 1914 of the new age when British rule in Nyasaland would disappear; when Africans would govern themselves; when free education would be provided; and when there "would be no more oppression from tax gatherers." "In the meantime," he urged his fellow Tonga not to "let your hearts be troubled; for the white man whom I represent will not only educate you freely, but will provide money for

taxes." 26

Evangelism was also introduced into Ngoniland where, although it had some success mainly in the areas bordering Tongaland, its impact was lessened because the missionaries there had baptized converts much more speedily than their lakeshore colleagues. The large bulk of persons who joined Kamwana's movement belonged to the masses of frustrated Africans who probably did not have much conception of the true nature of the Watch Tower doctrines but who saw in it a way of acquiring church membership and free education, though no schools were actually started in 1909. The leadership of Watch Tower was assumed by existing Free Church members such as teachers and monitors who were at odds with Livingstonia's strict discipline and who had been suspended.

"Talk of the removal of white governmental control became rife, amounting in some cases almost to a political revolt, and the glory of the coming age when there would be no more 'boma' or district resident governor, and no more taxes, was eagerly anticipated."<sup>27</sup> Kamwana's fiery political doctrines alarmed the government which was also receiving critical reports from the Scottish missionaries of the revival of old, pre-European tribal ways involving the return to polygamy, the reintroduction of obscene

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26. All quotations in this paragraph are from R.D. MacMinn, "The First Wave of Ethiopianism in Central Africa," The Livingstonia News, 2, 4 August 1909, pp.57-8. See also W.A. Elmslie, "Ethiopianism in Nyasaland," ibid., 2, 5 October 1909, pp.72-4, and GOA 2/4/14, Sharpe to C.O., 15 May 1909, M.N.A., Zomba.

27. N.O. Moore and W.D. Wilcox, op. cit., pp.719-20.



dances and other such practices which whites considered immoral. With the possibility of the movement developing into a mass resistance against taxation and as "any delay might have caused serious Native complications,"<sup>28</sup> Kamwana was arrested and deported. Given the choice of being detained at Mlanje in the southern region or of being exiled to South Africa, he chose the latter alternative but was eventually, in 1914, detained at Mlanje where he was placed under close surveillance. This did not prevent him from corresponding with John Chilembwe and it even appears that he was approached to join the 1915 Rising but refused.<sup>29</sup> After the Rising, he was accused of preaching seditious ideas in the Mlanje area and was deported to Mauritius and later to the Seychelles, being finally released in 1937.<sup>30</sup>

With Kamwana's arrest, the Watch Tower movement quickly collapsed. Many adherents now shifted their allegiance either to the Free Church or to the new Seventh Day Baptist sect introduced partly, as we shall see, by Charles Domingo. But by 1914 the movement still had around a thousand members and had, moreover, spread into other districts in the Protectorate. Watch Tower was not an entirely spent force.<sup>31</sup>

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28. GOA 2/4/14, Sharpe to C.O., 15 May 1909, M.N.A., Zomba.

29. GOA 2/4/14, Report by A.M.D. Turnbull dated 7 February 1915, M.N.A., Zomba.

30. ibid.; C.O.525/68, Smith to C.O., 26 August 1916; C.O.525/72, Smith to C.O., 15 January 1917; C.O.525/170, No.44195, Hall to C.O., 19 August 1937 - all P.R.O., London.

31. GOA 2/4/15, Smith to C.O., 6 March 1916 and enclosures, M.N.A., Zomba.

Watch Tower, under Kamwana, marked the beginnings of "the newer type of African reaction to the Europeans" though "it had obviously old-style tribal elements in it."<sup>32</sup> A similar observation came from a Blantyre missionary who noted that "Ethiopianism...has shown itself up the lake in forms that make for revolt against Government, and the throwing off of the control of the European in the Church. It is nationalism at the core, but showing itself in a bad way...."<sup>33</sup> During 1909 Watch Tower had been against the Government of Nyasaland and not, as in its later manifestations during the inter-war period, against Government as such. Though it used Watch Tower literature, in many ways it represented a separatist African movement independent of its European parent, in that Kamwana added to it his own teachings such as the non-payment of tax, the provision of free education, and the advent of African rule. As such it was a movement for African independence in Nyasaland and was more racial and specific than Russell's continental or global teachings. It was also forward-looking in that it did not reject westernization though it did not seek either to destroy traditional customs and practices. Yet the movement did not gain the support of either the majority of African church members, for obvious reasons, or of the prominent new men in the northern region who may have been disgruntled with the Scottish missionaries.

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32. G. Shepperson and T. Price, op. cit., p.154.

33. The Rev. Alexander Hetherwick, ed., Robert Hellier Napier in Nyasaland (Edinburgh, 1925), p.49.



These new Africans were in no way influenced by Watch Tower eschatology and were, instead, beginning to see the redress of their grievances through secular channels. But 'Kamwanaism' had managed to encompass Africans from various tribal backgrounds and had gained a sizeable following. Because of its attendant traditional orientations, however, it may be best regarded as a link between the older tribal-type resistance and the newer African reactions along European lines.

Another one of Booth's disciples now assumed the leadership of the growing northern African religious militancy. This was Charles Domingo, a Kunda, born around Sena in Mozambique about 1875. As a child he was taken from Quelimane and brought to Livingstonia where he began serving in the household of Dr. Laws. In time he became a protege of the veteran missionary.<sup>34</sup> A very able pupil, he was sent to Lovedale in South Africa for a period of two and a half years to further his studies. With the opening of the Overtoun Institution he was recalled to study at Livingstonia where he completed his standard six examinations and then his theological course being licensed to preach in May 1903.<sup>35</sup> Thereafter, he became

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34. W.P. Livingstone, Laws of Livingstonia (London, 1923), pp.194, 257, 277, 309, 327. See also S1/927/19, Resident, Mzimba to A.C.S., 28 May 1919, M.N.A., Zomba.

35. Overtoun Missionary Institution Boys Register, Vol.1, entry No.2, states that Domingo entered the Institution in July 1895 and went into the standard five class. See minutes of the Presbytery of North Livingstonia dated 2 November 1900 for Domingo's grades in his theological exit examination, the average being 65.1%. See also minutes dated 13 May 1903 for his being commissioned as a licentiate of the Presbyterian Church of Central Africa to preach the gospel.

the first African assistant at the Institution and an elder in the local congregation.

But all the great hopes placed in him by Laws were soon to be dashed. As early as 1901, Domingo had demonstrated his critical attitude to missionary teaching by reading a paper at a conference of African elders in Blantyre in which he supported certain forms of African dancing and castigated missionaries for their outright condemnation of such indigenous customs. In November 1907 he was appointed to the Loudon district with a view to taking charge of an African congregation in one of its centres. Shortly thereafter, however, he broke with the Free Church on one account because of a quarrel with the European minister in charge of Loudon district, the Rev. Donald Fraser,<sup>36</sup> and on another because of frustration at not being ordained after such a long period of time.<sup>37</sup> Moving south to the Shire Highlands he was briefly associated with Watch Tower as well as with the P.I.M. but seems to have had some differences with Chilembwe. He then came into indirect contact with Joseph Booth and joined the Seventh-Day Baptists. Booth, the religious hitch-hiker, had recently shifted his allegiance back to that sect from Watch Tower and Domingo now became its chief agent in Northern Ngoniland.<sup>38</sup>

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36. 1915 Commission Evidence: Rev. Donald Fraser dated 13 July 1915.

37. Interviews with Charles C. Chinula and Robert I. Ziba, Mzimba, Malawi.

38. S2/68"/19, Report by A.M.D. Turnbull dated 20 April 1915; N.O. Moore and W.D. Wilcox, *op. cit.*, p.724; 1915 Commission Evidence: Rev. Donald Fraser stated that Domingo went to England in 1908.



Domingo started his independent church in 1910 at Chipata near Mzimba. Booth directed this and the other African sabbatarian churches which were set up elsewhere from his headquarters in the Cape, leaving Domingo and other African pastors such as Gilbert Chihayi to look after the work of evangelization and organization. A tangle of independent African churches and a chain of independent African schools was established in the areas to the west of the lake and in the Shire Highlands by Domingo and other Africans who were often ex-Watch Tower members. The majority of adherents, as with Kamwana's movement, most likely came "out of Free Church mission Bible classes" while the leadership was in the hands of persons who had been teachers in Free Church schools and had probably "been dismissed from their places because of serious lapses from Christian living."<sup>39</sup> Booth and his backers supplied much of the funds, though these were by no means sufficient, and posted orthodox Baptist literature as well as Watch Tower Bibles because they were cheap. All this literature and documentation must have not only led to a confusion of doctrines being propagated by these rather superficial sabbatarian groups but provided them with ample material for political discussion. In these little churches, and particularly in those run by Domingo which were also the best organized, European rule and white attitudes were called in question,

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39. N.O. Moore and W.D. Wilcox, op. cit., p.716. This report contains a detailed account of Seventh Day Baptist work in Nyasaland up to 1912.

often in a religious guise, thus showing once again what a magnificent source the Bible is for the expression of the feelings of the oppressed of the earth.

Some extracts from letters written by Domingo will illustrate the nature and tenor of his criticisms though the one cited by Shepperson and Price in Independent African (pp.165-6) still remains the clearest exposition of his outspokenness. In similar vein Domingo claimed that

"Many a white fellows become Xtians when they are in Europe, and as soon as they taste Nyasaland coffee they turn-tail, and are unable to acknowledge their way of travelling within the truth of God. Even the very (so called) Reverends do loose their God's title (Psalms CX1:9) when they come in Nyassaland. They are not strong enough to stand firmly for the Truth....as soon as they will be in Zomba they will not then refuse the Satanic Rules or Regulations formed by the European here...."

Another quotation brings out clearly his deep disenchantment with Europeans:

"White fellows have been here for nearly 36 years, and not one of them sees a native as his Brother, but as his boy.... Do you suppose the whites that are in Nyassaland are pure christians? I count not so - they are too cheaty and destroyers of widows houses. We Africans are able to manage our powers as handed over to us by God. We are equal in mind with the white fellows." 40

Fortunately for Domingo, the authorities did not realize immediately the seriousness of his antagonism for otherwise he would have suffered the same fate as Kamwana. Perhaps no serious suspicion was thrown on Domingo because the Mzimba District Commissioner believed him to

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40. Undated letters by Domingo to Booth in Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society. I have seen the photocopied set in the Chancellor College Library, University of Malawi. I have retained Domingo's original spelling in the above quotations.



be "an exceptionally good and competent native."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, it was felt that, despite his known correspondence with Booth up to 1915, he taught "no undesirable doctrines" though it was vaguely realized that some of his letters showed "that he is probably intolerant of European control and supervision and aims at an independent native church which may or may not become political also."<sup>42</sup> Yet it is quite clear that Domingo's criticisms of European rule and white behaviour were pronouncedly outspoken. Eventually, however, in 1916 he was deported from the Protectorate although he played no part in the 1915 Rising. A letter written by him to Booth, who had now become absolutely anathema to the government because of his various indirect links with the Rising, was intercepted by the wartime censor and was deemed subversive as it signified Domingo's support for another one of Booth's schemes, the British African Congress petition of 1915, which advocated equal rights for Africans with Europeans.<sup>43</sup> But he was not detained for long. Towards the end of 1917 he was released and came to be employed by the government in its offices in Zomba and then Mzimba.<sup>44</sup> Domingo took no further part in any African political activity.

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41. N.O. Moore and W.D. Wilcox, *op. cit.*, pp.721-22.

42. C.O.525/67, Smith to C.O., 6 March 1916, enclosure No. 1, P.R.O., London.

43. For Domingo's letter to Booth see S1/927/19, A.C.S. to Resident, Mzimba, 8 May 1916, enclosure letter dated 4 February 1916, M.N.A., Zomba. The petition is contained in C.O.525/68, Smith to C.O., 28 August 1916, enclosure No.2, P.R.O., London.

44. S1/927/19, A.C.S. to Resident, Mzimba, 7 May 1919, M.N.A., Zomba.

In many ways Charles Domingo was the pioneer African nationalist in Nyasaland which, it must be remembered, was not his native country. Not only was he among the first Africans to articulate the sentiment of Nyasaland nationality but he was the first to voice the concept of territorial independence. He did not, however, regard his church as a means of organizing a possible political movement against European rule. Nor did he consider renouncing his pacifist ideals to engage in the violent overthrow of the colonial order. These were the roles which John Chilembwe was to perform through his P.I.M.

In the Shire Highlands, the Blantyre Mission also pursued a cautious policy regarding baptism and admission to the church. But the increased African interest in mission teaching, consequent upon the establishment of British political control, never led to the emergence of a popular religious movement which could exacerbate African religious grievances as in Tongaland. The attractions of the Blantyre Mission seem to have been more than counterbalanced by the opportunities available to Africans to find work and earn cash incomes on white estates which served to distract people from the missionaries. Indeed, missionaries were for ever complaining about their pupils leaving school to obtain paid employment on white plantations which required few or no academic qualifications.<sup>45</sup> Certainly Africans left the Mission on account of its arduous discipline and long

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45. The Rev. Alexander Hetherwick, ed., op. cit., p.34.



probationary period and thus swelled the ranks of the welter of sects that Joseph Booth and others had started up in the Highlands. But although political agitation among disquieted Africans was also to be canalized through independent African churches, the sources of African discontent were to be derived in part from the economic and social injustices of a settler planting and commercial economy as well as from frustration in and disenchantment with European missions.

### The 1915 Rising<sup>46</sup>

Though some of John Chilembwe's following at the P.I.M. and in the 1915 Rising may have been swayed by Watch Tower, and the number was probably very small, there is no direct evidence to suggest that he himself was in any way influenced by such doctrines. He undoubtedly knew of the teachings of both Kamwana and Domingo but his theology appears to have remained constantly of the more orthodox Baptist type. With Kamwana's deportation and while financial and doctrinal difficulties were encumbering Domingo's movement, Chilembwe's P.I.M. was continuing to grow in strength. Construction of a large brick church was started in 1911 and completed by the end of 1913. In 1912 over nine hundred pupils were reported to be studying at the half dozen P.I.M. schools, and

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46. For a detailed account of the planning and character of the Rising, see the authoritative treatment by G. Shepperson and T. Price, *op. cit.*, pp.165-359. My own research adds a number of new details and interpretations.

although the level of instruction provided was limited, results were fairly promising.<sup>47</sup>

The P.I.M. was also becoming a general meeting place, a forum for some of the new, aspiring Africans of the southern highlands. In the first place, Chilembwe had contacts with members of the Seventh Day Baptist faith in the Cholo area whom Booth was attempting to supervise from the Cape. There were also links with the keepers of the various small independent African churches that had broken away from the European-controlled Churches of Christ Mission which had begun operations in the Shire Highlands in 1908, also as a result of Booth's inspiration. These independent religious groupings provided opportunities for Africans who were discontented with the white missions to find a means for self-expression and leadership. As well, they constituted avenues for the channeling of African grievances usually under a religious guise. In the words of Shepperson and Price, in spite of "their often pathetic pretentiousness, they represented the first effective stirrings in Nyasaland...of a spirit of African independence, not of the old tribal kind of reaction to the white man's way of life but of a new kind of response to European culture along what they considered to be the lines of that culture's main elements as they saw them in their own little localities."<sup>48</sup> It appears that Chilembwe was

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47. NSB 1/2/1, Assistant Resident, Chiradzulu to Resident, Blantyre, 17 May 1913 with enclosure, M.N.A., Zomba.

48. G. Shepperson and T. Price, op. cit., p.241.



was thinking of uniting some or all of these African churches with the P.I.M. becoming the organizing centre. If African church unity was not immediately achieved, Chilembwe's independent African spirit was revealed in other ways, particularly in his rejection in 1912 of an invitation to join the predominantly European "Federation or a Unified Church of Central African Presbyterian."<sup>49</sup>

Apart from any ideas of the P.I.M. becoming the focal point for the various independent African churches, there was formed there, in mid-1911, the 'African Industrial Society', "a sort of producers' and consumers' cooperative."<sup>50</sup> This may have been a continuation under a new name of a similar self-help association that had been started up in April 1909 by a leading African businessman named Peter Mlelemba. The 1909 'Native Industrial Union', of which Chilembwe became the chairman at its second meeting, attracted to its membership most of the aspiring, new Africans in the southern region, including leading African civil servants and members of the Blantyre Mission.<sup>51</sup> Very little is known of the 1909 organization, but, most probably, just like its 1911 successor, although a few meetings were held it never went much beyond the

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49. GOA 2/4/14, Report by A.M.D. Turnbull dated 7 February 1915 containing letter by Rev. R.H. Napier of the Blantyre Mission to Chilembwe dated 20 May 1912, M.N.A., Zomba.

50. G. Shepperson and T. Price, *op. cit.*, p.166.

51. Some of these leading African members were: Joseph Bismarck (businessman); T. Lomas Maseah, Cedric Masangano, John Kufa Mapantha and Harry Matecheta (all of the Blantyre Mission); A.M. Chisuse (photographer); Ruben N. Funsani, John W. Mlanga (Government clerks); Ardwell Mlanga; and K.M. Malinki (of the Z.I.M.).

paper proposal stage. Yet it emphasized, together with the ideas on African church unity, the growing national consciousness of these new men. And at the forefront of this new consciousness was John Chilembwe. His ambition was to improve the lot of Africans generally by instilling in them a sense of self-respect through the achievement of success on European lines and by making them conscious of their economic and social power. His social ideal was the promotion of an industrial mission scheme which would make the African conscious of his abilities and potentialities through the development of economic and other responsibilities. But there is no evidence to suggest that any political militancy was evolving in his mind before 1912. Certainly he must have continued to voice his criticisms of the colonial situation but he was still acting constitutionally and was not plotting a revolt at this time.

From 1912 on, however, the indications are that Chilembwe gradually began to eschew his constitutional approach of operating within the colonial framework. A series of personal and social factors may have exacerbated his feelings, increased his bitterness against Europeans in the Protectorate, and moved him to open revolt. For a number of years he appears to have been heavily in debt with a local African trader at a particularly trying time when expenses were mounting and some of his funds were



drying up from his American source.<sup>52</sup> Attacks of asthma, the death of a daughter, the worsening of his eyes and general health added to his financial discomforts and may have deepened his alienation. Social grievances centring on the nearby A.L. Bruce estates made his problems even more burdensome. Some of his followers had, around 1911-12, built small, grass-hut churches on these estates because of their distance from the P.I.M. Even after obtaining permission for their construction, the churches were burnt down on the instructions of the estate manager, an action which must have been deeply resented both by Chilembwe and his flock. Numerous complaints were also voiced by labourers working on these plantations such as that their wages were low and often paid in kind which when sold fetched less than their expected value. The manager of the estate, W.J. Livingstone, dealt harshly with his tenants and workers, forcing them to toil long hours and whipping them for minor offences.<sup>53</sup> It is even claimed that Chilembwe and Livingstone exchanged blows on one occasion.<sup>54</sup>

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52. It seems that Chilembwe borrowed money from a Peter Mlelemba to start a store which went bankrupt and that he was thereafter incessantly hounded for the repayment of the loan. Also, when the African Industrial Society became moribund, Chilembwe and Duncan Njilima, chairman and secretary respectively, were unable to repay all the subscribers. See 1915 Commission Evidence: L.T. Moggridge, Resident, Blantyre dated 28 June 1915.

53. See Report of the Commission...to Inquire into...The Native Rising...Within the Nyasaland Protectorate (hereafter R.C.N.R.) 6819 (Zomba, 1916), para.13(e), pp.5-6, for a description of the major African grievances on the Bruce estates. See also S1/172'/19, Resident to C.S., 2 April 1915, M.N.A., Zomba.

54. Interviews with Miriam Joan Chilembwe (a niece of John Chilembwe) and her husband Yohane Masanjala, Chiradzulu, Malawi.

With Africans taking their complaints to him, Chilembwe must steadily have become more critical of white rule and white persons in the Protectorate, especially when the government refused to respond to his apparent attempts at protest. All of the foregoing and other economic and social problems such as the occurrence of a serious famine from 1911 through to 1913, the raising of the hut tax in 1912, and the ongoing social prejudice and discrimination among whites, must have disillusioned Chilembwe and made him more bitter against colonialism and the arrogant Europeans in Nyasaland. But perhaps it was his own personal position and despairing feelings that most inclined him towards open conspiracy. Psychologically, Chilembwe was quite likely desperate in his state of mind consequent upon his financial difficulties, his generally poor health and the fact that he "was nearly blind latterly."<sup>55</sup>

As to how far these factors leading to Chilembwe's growing alienation precipitated the 1915 Rising, we are still not certain. More probably, it is suggested by most writers, the outbreak and effects of the first World War sharpened existing resentments and provided the key stimuli. The rise in the price of essential goods at a time when Chilembwe was in dire financial difficulties must have moved him to the point of desperation. But there was also the issue of the involvement of growing numbers of Africans in the fighting against the Germans along the

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55. 1915 Commission Evidence: Rev. R.H. Napier dated 9 July 1915.



northern borders of the Protectorate. On his return from America, Chilembwe had criticized the employment of Central African troops in 'European' wars in the Gold Coast and Somaliland during 1901-2. Now, in 1914, he was to protest against the recruitment of Malawians in the Great War. With increasing numbers being called up to assist and fight in the northern campaigns, and after the news of serious Malawian casualties against the Germans at Karonga in late September 1914, Chilembwe wrote a long letter of protest to the Nyasaland Times which was printed in the issue of 26 November but was immediately suppressed by the government censor. The letter clearly conveyed Chilembwe's growing animus towards the white authorities as well as demonstrating his general sense of outrage at Africans being "crippled for life" and being "invited to die for a cause which is not theirs."<sup>56</sup> The censoring of the letter must therefore have been something of a last straw for Chilembwe and seems to have been the point when he actually moved to militancy. The government had ignored all his complaints and protests and refused to give him a hearing. So, driven to exasperation, he now began plotting and organizing for a rebellion. For he must clearly have possessed those attributes of the feeling "that he had to give the lead in the 'deliverance' of his people: the same kind of sentiment which had inspired many a Negro agitator on the slave plantations in the New World. The special circumstances of Chilembwe's

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56. Letter cited in full in G. Shepperson and T. Price, op. cit., pp.234-5.

life, his travels, all reinforced this conviction that he had a special destiny."<sup>57</sup>

It is still not possible to provide an entirely accurate account of the planning of the Rising or of the strategy and tactics involved. Because of the destruction and non-availability of certain records, much has to be drawn from the steadily growing amount of primary documentation which has so far been released, existing secondary sources which are generally of little value, and scanty and often confused oral testimony. Perhaps the best way to make an attempt at tackling this problem is by looking first at the persons who supported Chilembwe both as his leading advisers as well as his rank and file members.

A small group of relatively educated Africans who had received their training either at the Blantyre Mission or at the multiplication of African schools in the Shire Highlands, constituted Chilembwe's leading lieutenants and composed the members of the inner circle of conspirators. Of these Kufa, Njilima and Chinyama may be singled out for greater attention while brief mention may be made of Mkuluchi and Kaduya mainly because we possess few details on these latter characters. With all of them Chilembwe had had long and close contacts. Some of them he had become acquainted with during his Z.I.M. days; others he had met initially at a Blantyre Mission out-school; while others had joined him at the P.I.M. His most distinguished and respected follower was John Gray Kufa

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57. ibid., p.263.



Mapantha, who was a Sena from Mozambique, and who was to play something of the role of his second-in-command. A highly promising student of the Blantyre Mission, Kufa had fulfilled the trust and hopes placed in him by becoming the foremost African assistant and dispenser in its hospital and also an elder in the Blantyre church. But he does not seem to have always enjoyed an amicable relationship with the Scottish missionaries. When he bought a small plot of land at Nsoni in the Chiradzulu district and when he insisted on buying a shotgun for a local hunting trip, he seems, through these actions, to have come into some sort of collision with the mission head, Dr. A. Hetherwick, and to have been asked to leave mission employment. On the recommendation of Hetherwick, however, he was able to begin work as a dispenser for the A.L. Bruce estates at Magomero.<sup>58</sup> It seems that it was during this time, between 1913 and 1914, that Kufa may have come into serious conflict with the manager, W.J. Livingstone. Dr. Hetherwick mentions, without any conclusive evidence, that Livingstone made indecent overtures to Kufa's niece who worked as a nurse on the estate. Kufa seems to have protested about this incident, and it may well be that it was this case which, together with his first-hand experience of conditions on the Magomero estate, turned him closer to Chilembwe's own growing critical point of view.<sup>59</sup>

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58. 1915 Commission Evidence: Alexander Hetherwick dated 29 June 1915.

59. C.O.525/66, Smith to C.O., 7 February 1916, enclosure No.D, note of confidential written evidence given by the Rev. Dr. Alexander Hetherwick, n.d., P.R.O., London.

Another one of Chilembwe's fellow conspirators was Duncan Njilima who may have been of Kololo origin and who had been a long-standing member of the Blantyre Mission before being "ex-communicated ten years ago for bigamy."<sup>60</sup> After visiting Southern Rhodesia and South Africa and, perhaps, having come into contact with Booth's Plainfield mission in Cholo, Njilima had started his own estate in the Chiradzulu district and become a comparatively wealthy property owner. Both Kufa and Njilima lived at Nsoni, ran a series of small stores, visited and prayed at the P.I.M., and had close relations with Chilembwe. They were his right-hand men.

From the chain of independent African schools that had been built up around the independent and separatist African churches in the Shire Highlands, there had emerged a further group of less educated persons who came to constitute both Chilembwe's leading and minor officials in the 1915 Rising. Stephen Mkuluchi was a Yao related to Chilembwe who after teaching at the Z.I.M. in Southern Ngoniland had become a teacher at the P.I.M. David Kaduya, an Mpotola from Mlanje, had had military experience in Somaliland and was a deacon at the P.I.M. Both of these men were prominent not only in organizing the details of the attacks that were to be launched as well as instructing the large numbers of followers but also in leading the various divisions of Chilembwe's

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60. See footnote No.58.



'army' during the Rising.<sup>61</sup> Of similar importance was Filipino Chinyama in whose hands lay the organization of a supplementary revolt in Ncheu.

Chinyama had been born in Mozambique but his family had moved over the border to Ncheu in the 1890s probably as part of the group under the Ngoni chief Makwangwala which had shifted its site to be near the Baptist Industrial Mission of Scotland station at Dzunje. Here Chinyama had received his early education before going to the Shire Highlands where he became attached to at least two of the various sects inspired by Booth - the Seventh-day Adventists and the Churches of Christ. Thereafter, Chinyama had joined the P.I.M. as a student and then journeyed to Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia where he became ordained as a pastor of the Seventh Day Baptists. On his return home in 1911, he had started his own movement at Nthinda village, a few miles from Dzunje, but although permitted to open a school he had not been allowed to construct a church by the District Resident, an action that he must have deeply resented. Whatever the cause for his decision to revolt in 1915, he was able to gather together a large number of discontented Africans consisting of members of his church movement or simply local adventurers and build up a fairly sizeable force. Chinyama's influence, however, seems to have been limited to the Dzunje section of Chief Makwangwala and Africans from the other sections in Southern Ngoniland

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61. Interviews with Wylie P. Chigamba and Wilfred B. Mtambo, Chiradzulu, Malawi.

took no part in the Rising.<sup>62</sup>

Chilembwe and his leading followers seem to have aimed at setting up a primarily African state to supplant British rule retaining, however, a number of selected Europeans to profer advice and guidance to the new African rulers. In a series of meetings held in December 1914 and early January 1915, agreement was reached to make the initial armed thrusts against the Europeans of the Shire Highlands and Ncheu district, areas where groups or individuals existed bearing allegiance to Chilembwe and his main followers.<sup>63</sup> The bulk of Chilembwe's following was to be made up of adherents of the P.I.M., with other independent African churches in the southern region providing some support. To these groupings, an attempt may have been made to add discontented African tenants and workers both on the A.L. Bruce estates and on other white plantations in the Highlands. Again, it seems reasonable that attempts may have been made to enlist the aid of friends and relatives of African soldiers killed or wounded in the campaigns against the Germans. Many of the soldiers in the King's African Rifles were recruited from the Yao peoples and Chilembwe, because of his tribal links, may have sought to attach them to his cause. Little, in fact, appears to have been done to attract these two latter groupings perhaps because, as we shall suggest below, there was no time to mobilize them. Greater success was achieved, however, in obtaining the support

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62. Interviews with J.R.N. Chinyama, Ncheu, Malawi

63. George Simeon Mwase, Strike A Blow And Die (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), pp.35-6.



of the independent African church adherents who bolstered Chilembwe's P.I.M. following. It is necessary to consider these persons from the small African churches before proceeding with the details of the Rising itself.

The Commission of Inquiry into the Rising made a number of important references to the role of independent African religious groupings in the rebellion. From them, and from "the parent Churches" it claimed, "John Chilembwe drew a considerable section of his followers." It was also "part of his scheme to form a union between their various sects and his own Mission." Again, the "rising was not general, but was chiefly confined to natives connected with independent native Christian sects or associations, more or less under Chilembwe's influence," and that the "objects of the rising were the extermination of the European population, and the setting up of a native state or theocracy of which John Chilembwe was to be the head."<sup>64</sup> My own research tends to confirm all of these statements which we must now develop in more detail.

Chilembwe always seems to have had some conception of African church unity with the P.I.M. as its organizing centre. He also seems to have visualized some sort of role which an independent African church could play in his new African state as well as in its creation. It is reported that on 12 January 1915, a meeting was held at the P.I.M. to establish a union between his church and the African-controlled Churches of Christ. Indeed, since such a fairly large number of persons from these independent

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64. R.C.N.R., paras 13(d), 14, 15, pp.5-6.

churches were implicated in the Rising, it seems that Chilembwe was attempting not only to develop closer links with these sects but seeking to mobilize them in support of his rebellion. Only a few converts were drawn to Chilembwe from the Seventh Day Baptists but a larger number came from the independent African groupings which had broken away from the parent mission. More importantly, under the wings of a few lenient Europeans in charge of the Churches of Christ Mission, a string of semi-independent African churches had been set up in the Blantyre, Chiradzulu and Mlanje districts. Together with the little churches that had broken away from the white-led mission, their members had close contacts with the P.I.M. and provided the greater part of Chilembwe's supporters from the independent African churches. Prominent among these African Churches of Christ leaders were Simon Kadawere and Barton Makwangwala (no relation of the Ncheu chief) who between them had had connexions with Booth and his various religious attachments, had had spells in South Africa, and became the organizers of the revolt in the Zomba area.<sup>65</sup> After the Rising, it was reported that in the village of a Zomba headman named Kimu, a brother of Barton, "the intended operations against Zomba were organized" and that the "papers seized at John Chilembwe's village, at Makwangwala's (the Zomba one) and elsewhere disclose a wide and well organized movement

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65. S2/68"/19, Report by A.M.D. Turnbull dated 20 April 1915, M.N.A., Zomba.



to attack and massacre the whites...."<sup>66</sup> Certainly the links between Chinyama's movement in Ncheu, the independent Seventh Day Baptist and Churches of Christ groupings in Zomba, Blantyre and Mlanje, and the congregations of the P.I.M. in Chiradzulu and Mlanje, appear to bear this statement out although the actual details of the organization are not clear.

The plan was composed of three parts. First, a series of attacks were to be launched on key European centres in the Blantyre-Chiradzulu-Zomba area with a view to gaining control of strategic sites and also raiding stores and depots for arms and ammunition. Simultaneously, Filipo Chinyama and his associates were to revolt in the Dzunje-Ncheu area, move southwards to Liwonde, Neno and Blantyre and link up with the main forces under Chilembwe.<sup>67</sup> Finally, a small group of chiefs in the Mlanje area were to attack the administrative headquarters and seize its arms. Some of these chiefs, who are said to have been Chikumbu, Matapwiri and Nyesarera, may have been the ones or the heirs of those who had collided with the British during the early 1890s.<sup>68</sup> A formidable force of Africans would thus be joined together surrounding the main centres of European concentration in the Protectorate. Within this area, moreover, it appears that plans were made to attempt to get house-servants and other African

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66. C.O.525/61, Smith to C.O., 3 February 1915, P.R.O., London.

67. G.S. Mwase, op. cit., p.38.

68. GOA 2/4/15, Resident, Mlanje report dated 12 February 1915, M.N.A., Zomba.

employees to attack their European masters, and it was hoped as well to persuade some askari or police to join in the rebellion.<sup>69</sup> Shortly before the outbreak of the Rising, Chilembwe also contacted the German authorities in East Africa. It is not known what was contained in his letter to the Germans but it is just possible that he sought to enlist their support either directly or indirectly through their exerting increased pressure on the northern Nyasaland borders thus leading to the main British force being stationed there while the southern region remained undermanned and vulnerable to African attack. But this latter suggestion must remain mere speculation for want of any reliable evidence.

It is probable that Chilembwe must have had a strong inkling that any African revolt, however well organized, would in the end be defeated by superior British military force and that the chances of his rebellion achieving success were extremely slim. Yet the risks were calculated and accepted. It may therefore be conceivable that Chilembwe saw the Rising in symbolic terms, as a way of registering a most effective protest against colonial authority and the white settlers. By way of revolt he may have hoped forcibly to show the white man that African grievances were real and that they required urgent redress. The rebellion would demonstrate in the clearest way that some Africans at least would not

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69. R.C.F. Maugham, Nyasaland In the Nineties and other recollections (London, 1935), p.55.



always passively accept the abuses and injustices they were suffering. Nonetheless, with the British fully engaged in a war with the Germans, there was a slight chance that his plans might succeed.

But the government's suspicions had been aroused by the affair of Chilembwe's anti-war letter of late November 1914. Already in August a report had been received from the Roman Catholic Marist Fathers at Nguludi, a few miles from the P.I.M., that Chilembwe was planning a rebellion. All correspondence to and from the P.I.M. was examined but nothing seditious was found. In December 1914, the Blantyre Resident could write that "there is very little to be feared from the man; his influence is very limited."<sup>70</sup> However, these remarks were probably made on the basis of investigations conducted before Chilembwe actually decided to rebel and commenced holding his meetings to plan the organization of the Rising. For on the basis of perhaps later findings, Governor Smith could state that "enough was disclosed in the correspondence, in the mystery assumed, and in the activity displayed by members of the body to determine me to deport John Chilembwe and some others.... For this purpose I approached the Governor of Mauritius

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70. GOA 2/4/14, Resident, Blantyre to C.S., 11 December 1914. See also Resident, Blantyre to A.C.S., 3 November 1914 and Annual Report of Blantyre Resident dated 31 March 1915. NSB 1/2/2 contains the monthly reports for Chiradzulu from August to December 1914 which also state that there was nothing seditious about Chilembwe's activities during this period. These files are all in the M.N.A., Zomba.

on the 13th. of January as to the willingness of his Government to receive native deportees for us. A favourable reply was received on the 15th., but John Chilembwe has anticipated me."<sup>71</sup> Oral testimony in Malawi states that the date when Chilembwe was to be arrested at the P.I.M. was Monday, 25 January.<sup>72</sup> The story runs that Chilembwe got wind of this intention to deport him within a few days from a clerk in the Zomba Secretariat who was a member of the P.I.M., and that he was accordingly forced to bring forward the time of his proposed revolt which was actually supposed to break out later on. The evening of Saturday, 23 January was now chosen as the time to rise in rebellion.<sup>73</sup>

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71. C.O.525/61, Smith to C.O., 3 February 1915, P.R.O., London. See also R.C.F. Maugham, *op. cit.*, p.55 where he states: "...the Governor...prepared to deport Chilembwe. To this end arrangements had actually been made, and, in a few days, he would have been on his way to the Seychelles Islands, when the blow fell.

72. Interviews with W.P. Chigamba and W.B. Mtambo. See also Robert I. Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), p.86: "According to another member of the cabal, on Friday or Saturday, Chilembwe unexpectedly sent a messenger to the various Providence Industrial Mission churches to tell his followers that 'the Europeans planned to kill the natives on Monday, and that they must rise.'"

73. Interviews with W.P. Chigamba and W.B. Mtambo. See also NSB1/2/2, monthly report for Chiradzulu, January 1915: "As far as one can gather now there was a meeting held at Chilembwe's place on Friday the 22nd January 1915 at which it was arranged that the Europeans should be killed....," M.N.A., Zomba. Also 1915 Commission Evidence: B.T. Milthorp, Assistant Resident, Blantyre dated 28 June 1915: "The only think (sic.) I know from what I learnt afterwards was, that the plan was formed on the Friday." And also statement of C.A. Cardew, Resident at Ncheu dated 5 November 1915: "On or about 18th January Filipino (Chinyama) received a letter from John Chilembwe telling him to come to a meeting at John Chilembwe's Church." This last statement perhaps indicates that Chilembwe was initially planning to rebel sometime after 23 January.



The bringing forward of the date of the Rising must have made the prospects of success even more unlikely especially if Chilembwe changed his plans only shortly before 23 January and decided to rise up on that night instead of on a later date. Certainly in his hastiness he was not able to make adequate preparations to ensure the full support of the Mlanje chiefs, and Chinyama in Ncheu received his instructions as to when to rebel very late.<sup>74</sup> Also it was only a few days before the outbreak of the Rising that Chilembwe dispatched his letter to the German authorities which indicates that he might not have been planning to revolt so soon and that the news of his imminent deportation impelled him to move more rapidly. As a consequence of his need to launch an insurrection quickly, Chilembwe may have realized that the revolt would now be a forlorn attempt to obtain power. It is possible that it was at this particular juncture that he turned his Rising into a symbolical gesture of protest to demonstrate that Africans were not happy with their lot and that some of them were willing to die for their countrymen to give these grievances a wider prominence in the hope of obtaining satisfactory redress. It may well be that Chilembwe now sought martyrdom and by way of this most effective and dramatic protest obtain a better future for his fellows.<sup>75</sup> In the words of one published African

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74. G.S. Mwase, op. cit., pp.37-9.

75. ibid., pp.48-9. See also 1915 Commission Evidence: Robertson Namate (Native clerk in the Zomba Secretariat) dated 6 July 1915 where he alludes to martyrdom.

biography of Chilembwe, he is said to have declared: "Let us then strike a blow and die," while a similar expression is used by another but briefer African discussion of the Rising: John Chilembwe preached "If death means anything - I would rather die for my people than to live."<sup>76</sup>

There is another possible interpretation of this final episode which may perhaps never be accurately reconstructed. On receiving information about his imminent deportation, and there is growing evidence to suggest that this was the case, Chilembwe decided to launch his Rising quickly and as effectively as possible. Some of his initial plans may have had to be cast awry to make way for a speedy revolt. But he may still have been confident that the revolt would be successful and that it might spark off further supporting resistance from the local African peoples. However, if all was lost, then he and his followers would flee into neighbouring Mozambique. It appears that his immediate plans for carrying out the rebellion were still essentially the same as those worked out previously. Attacks were to be made on certain depots to obtain arms and ammunition; a number of European settlers were to be attacked; and the two risings in Ncheu and the Shire Highlands were to break out simultaneously and meet together in Zomba. Perhaps he could not organize the house-servants, certain askari or

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76. G.S. Mwase, op. cit., pp.48-50; K.W. Kulujili, Short Notes on Past and Present Malawi (unpublished manuscript), p.12.



soldiers in time, but they might join the rebellion once it had broken out. On his realization, however, that some of his attacks had failed to produce any large quantity of arms; that some of his leading lieutenants had lost heart; that no real mass support was forthcoming; and that Chinyama and his group had suffered reverses and would not be able to move south and link up with his own splintering forces, Chilembwe must have at last known that all was lost and fled to Mozambique.<sup>77</sup> This interpretation does not suggest martyrdom or stress the essentially symbolic intent of the rebellion. That interpretation, which appears somewhat unlikely, cannot account for a number of points such as why Chilembwe wrote to Chinyama to start his secondary rising in Ncheu and why he himself fled to Mozambique instead of staying to defend the P.I.M. to the bitter end. The statements attributed to him that fighting would mean death, and they are not very clear, may have been made in an attempt by Chilembwe, on the eve of the Rising, either to rally the timorous to his cause or to inform his followers that victory would not be achieved without the loss of African lives. The 1915 Rising, then, was a rebellion initiated in haste and which proved to be absurdly abortive.

On the night of Saturday, 23 January 1915, Chilembwe and his followers flared into armed insurrection. From their centre at the P.I.M., two small forces marched in opposite directions, one north to the A.L. Bruce estates, the

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77. G.S. Mwase, op. cit., pp.39-41, 43, 50.

other to Blantyre. The Magomero party attacked the home of W.J. Livingstone, decapitated him and killed two other Europeans. The Blantyre party attempted to raid the African Lakes Corporation's ammunition and gun store but the attacks failed, as did those of another party against the Chiradzulu Boma, mainly because a few leading lieutenants shrank from their tasks which either left the attacks uncoordinated or led to no attacks being made at all. Regarding the Ncheu Rising, the local District Resident seems to have received warnings of a possible assault from a friendly chief and was able to make preparations for defence. Chinyama and his followers were arrested before any attacks could be mounted though there appears to have been a march of over a hundred men towards the Boma, with the intent of attacking it, which broke up when it was realized that government police and soldiers were waiting to confront the rebels.<sup>78</sup>

The revolt was short-lived. No further important raids were made and Chilembwe and his followers, knowing that they were doomed, broke up and fled in the direction of the Mozambique border. Some eight hundred rebels were captured. Four hundred were soon released, while three hundred were convicted and about one hundred acquitted. Forty-six were sentenced to death, eight of whom had their sentences commuted to imprisonment.<sup>79</sup> And, on 3 February 1915, Chilembwe himself was tracked down, shot and killed.<sup>80</sup>

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78. GOA 2/4/15, Report by H.L. Duff dated 3 February 1915.

79. Figures cited in GOA 2/4/15, Smith to C.O., 8 May 1915.

80. For Chilembwe's death, see GOA 2/4/15, report by the Resident, Mlanje dated 12 February 1915.



In the words of Governor Smith, the Rising opened up "a new phase in the existence of Nyasaland. Native risings there have been in the past, localized in character and attributable to causes which could be understood and appreciated in the conquest and settlement of a savage country."<sup>81</sup> But the Chilembwe Rising was very different from the initial African resistances to the imposition of British rule. These had been essentially tribal revolts which aimed at recovering old conditions and returning to the old tribal way of life. Chilembwe and his leading lieutenants, however, envisaged a type of government very different from the old tribal rule; they aimed at establishing an African state which would be wider than the narrow tribal base. They also desired full entry into the European styles of life rather than a return to the past. The Rising was in no way a rejection of the new ways of life. Instead, it was a forcible protest, as a last resort, against those very features of British rule which were to educated Africans a gross betrayal of the promises of European civilization. For many whites, the vicious slaying of W.J. Livingstone and the gruesome act of decapitation in the presence of his distraught wife typified the savage nature of the whole movement. Certainly there can be no doubt that the cutting off of Livingstone's head was a brutal act. But the gentle treatment meted out to the women and children who were captured at Magomero, their eventual release at

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81. GOA 2/4/15, Smith to C.O., 3 February 1915, M.N.A., Zomba.

a time when they could so easily have been harmed whilst the rebels were fleeing from the P.I.M., and the absence of any widespread looting and arson, also show that there was a highly civilized side to the actions of the rebels.

Led by and composed of Africans of varied tribal backgrounds, the Rising was also the first real trans-tribal movement of opposition to British rule, though Kamwana's Watch Tower movement may deserve a similar appellation. Notwithstanding its restriction mainly to the Shire Highlands, the 1915 Rising contained elements of the concept of nationalism. Chilembwe's aspirations of creating some sort of united African church which would play some cultural unifying link in his proposed state, and his articulation of the concept of the territorial nationality of Nyasaland, symbolized, at least, the ideological elements of nationalism.

But not all of the growing body of new men followed Chilembwe. Leaders of independent African religious groupings such as Domingo and Kamwana, following the pacifist lines of Booth, rejected the idea of militant action; whilst members of some of the European-controlled missions such as Rev. Stephen Kundera of the Blantyre Mission and K.M. Malinki of the Z.I.M., although approached to join, refused to do so. Many of these and other new men must have sympathized with Chilembwe and agreed with him about the nature and extent of African grievances, but they were not willing to move to the point of resorting to violence to overthrow the colonial



order. In the first place, many of them were probably not confident of running an independent African state. More likely, most of them must have continued to see the need for Europeans to maintain their presence and activities in the Protectorate. For the impression one gets of educated African opinion at this time is that it viewed British rule and white activity, despite its shortcomings, as a great blessing to the African peoples. A statement by Y.Z. Mwase, whom we have already shown to be critical of the Livingstonia missionaries, seems apposite in this context. Although written in 1924 it sums up the views of the new men regarding the civilizing role of western forces in the regeneration of Africa. Mwase wrote: "The expression 'White man makes Africa' goes without saying - Freedom from slavery, universal peace, cessation of war, Light, both intellectual and spiritual, in fact every good thing we undeservedly owe to white man...."<sup>82</sup>

However one, as a colonial subject, might have felt about British rule, it had a certain legitimacy in the context of its civilizing and modernizing functions.

Although a few chiefs sided with Chilembwe in the rebellion, most of the traditional authorities would probably not have supported him in such a violent cause against the colonial government. With very few exceptions, they must undoubtedly have preferred the rule of the British, fully appreciating that the new emergent African

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82. Y.T. Mwasi to Rev. A.G. MacAlpine, 7 April 1924 in A.G. MacAlpine papers, Gen.766/2, University of Edinburgh Library.

leadership threatened their favoured position. For despite their having become the subordinate civil servants of the colonial administration, they were also finding that the colonial regime was attempting to consolidate their few remaining powers and preserve their traditional role as representatives of African opinion. The risk of revolt, therefore, was one that offered them little advantage. Yet the fact that overtures were made to some chiefs and that most of those who were approached did not immediately betray him, indicates that Chilembwe's relations with traditional authorities were not altogether strained.

As for the vast majority of the population still clinging to the customary modes of life, only a small number of largely discontented labourers and tenants on the A.L. Bruce estates were attracted to Chilembwe. Even the onset of the first World War, with its large-scale recruitment of Nyasas as carriers and soldiers and its burdensome government levies on local peoples for food and other services, was not to occasion the masses either to protest or to rise up in revolt. Only one important chief, the northern Ngoni paramount Chimtunga, was to show himself hostile to these wartime exactions at a time when the colonial masters were at a serious disadvantage.<sup>83</sup> A few possible explanations may be given here to suggest why the masses could not be easily mobilized into a mass rebellion and why there were not any peasant outbursts

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83. C.O.525/63, Smith to C.O., 15 November 1915; C.O.525/66, Smith to C.O., 17 January 1916 with enclosures, P.R.O., London.



against the early colonial situation.

In the first place the hand of colonial rule was comparatively light throughout most of the Protectorate. The administration was a remote establishment whose legislations hardly affected the lives of ordinary Africans. The imposition of the hut tax was, of course, a source of much complaint. In the southern region, however, tax liabilities could be quite easily met by most Africans as sufficient economic opportunities existed for them to earn cash. But in the northern half of Nyasaland thousands of Africans were forced to migrate to neighbouring countries to earn cash to meet their hut tax obligations. If there had been no such economic safety-valve enabling tribesmen to work outside their homeland, it is probable that a considerable force of exasperation could have been built up among northern Africans. White settler pressures were also very slight throughout much of the country. Europeans were not often seen and for nearly five months of the year, during the rainy season, most of the roads were usually unpassable. Certainly there were acute land and labour grievances in the Shire Highlands and Africans were subject to the injustices and insults inherent in the growth of a settler economy and culture. But Africans resident on white estates lacked any effective political communicators. The chiefs on private lands had lost their authority and were no longer the real representatives of their people. John Chilembwe had attempted to perform this sort of role but his influence had been confined to the disgruntled

on the A.L. Bruce plantations. On the other white estates in the southern highland districts of Cholo and Mlanje there were no Africans either to act as effective spokesmen or to mobilize the discontented residents for political purposes. Perhaps the most important factor as to why there was no mass rural disaffection was that there was a lack of any heavy external burdens on the tribesmen in the Protectorate. Production methods and land tenure, the most fundamental aspects of customary life, continued to remain unchanged and unaffected by direct governmental pressure. As a result there were rarely any acute complaints to articulate on behalf of most of the African cultivators in the rural areas. Many years were to pass before a conjunction between the elite and the mass in African politics was to be achieved in Nyasaland and then there was to be launched a more general and successful opposition to the white man's rule.

For the new men of the inter-war period, John Chilembwe did not become a martyr as he would for later African nationalist leaders. During the late 1950s, African nationalists came to look upon him as a hero though not as a messiah.<sup>84</sup> But if the statements recorded on Chilembwe in the 1920s are to be taken as representative of the real views of the inter-war African politicians, then the 1915 Rising evoked no sympathetic response from them. Southern region Africans termed the Rising "a nasty

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84. R.L. Wishlade, Sectarianism in Southern Nyasaland (London, 1965), pp.138-9. See also Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Inquiry, Cmnd.814 (1959), pp.8-9.



incident which should well be forgotten"<sup>85</sup> and northern Africans echoed these views by declaring that the revolt was "a black mark on the natives of the Protectorate in general."<sup>86</sup> As to how far these remarks corresponded to the true feelings of the inter-war Africans is difficult to know, particularly in view of the government's severe suppression of the Rising and its forceful denunciation of Chilembwe. Many Africans must have secretly respected Chilembwe for all that he had stood for and his memory was never to die out. But it was also very clear to Africans that the Rising had been absurdly abortive. Once again the futility of rebellion had been demonstrated and no significant redress of African grievances had been achieved. The Europeans were too strong to be forced and new and constitutional techniques of political action were required to seek the betterment of African conditions. Moreover, with the government having clamped down on and suppressed most of the independent African churches, non-religious vehicles of political action were desirable. Although some African-controlled churches were permitted to function, the close connexions between religion and politics came to an end. For the politics of the inter-war period, Chilembwe and his Providence Industrial Mission provided little relevance and although

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85. S1/3263/23, Minutes of meeting of the Nyasaland Southern Province Native Association held on 14 August 1926, M.N.A., Zomba.

86. S1/1481/19, L.Z. Mumba to Superintendent of Native Affairs, 27 June 1919 containing extracts from minutes of meeting of the North Nyasa Native Association held between 17-20 June 1919, M.N.A., Zomba.

not "forgotten" could be relegated by Africans to the category of "things best forgotten".



## CHAPTER FIVE

### African Groups and the Politics of Inter-War Native Associations.

#### Native Associations as pressure groups

From the time that the North Nyasa Native Association (N.N.N.A.) resumed its activities in June 1919 to the year 1924 when some educated Africans in the southern region at last came to feel sufficiently secure to form their own similar organizations, African political activity was confined to northern Nyasaland. In 1920, the West Nyasa Native Association (W.N.N.A.) recommenced its meetings and, in the same year, Africans in the remaining northern district started the Mombera Native Association (M.N.A.). In that year also, the N.N.N.A. "made an effort to get into communication with the Zomba and Blantyre natives" but "no replies were received."<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that immediately after the war a considerable number of European settlers had entered the Shire Highlands and that the total acreage under Crown lease had consequently risen by just over a hundred thousand acres,<sup>2</sup> southern Africans, although undoubtedly anxious regarding the security of their land and entertaining various other

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1. Levi Z. Mumba, "Native Associations in Nyasaland," Zo Ona, 24 April 1924, p.1.

2. Report of a Commission to Enquire into and Report upon Certain Matters connected with the Occupation of Land in the Nyasaland Protectorate, 10582 (Zomba, 1921), p. 24.

grievances as well, could not be moved easily into organized political activity. Swift and heavy retribution had followed the Chilembwe Rising which must have left many local Africans extremely apprehensive about engaging in politics. Only in late 1923 was Levi Mumba, corresponding secretary of the N.N.N.A., with the aid of a Church of Scotland missionary at Domasi, the Rev. James Reid, instrumental in persuading educated southerners that conditions were now more amenable for the formation of Native Associations in their region. Mumba had recently been transferred to Zomba to work as a store-keeper in the Public Works Department and his new position brought him into closer and continuous contact with the local African intelligentsia. Reid was at that time the missionary responsible for African interests in the Legislative Council and he seems to have seen the need for an African body which he could consult regarding southern African viewpoints. With the encouragement and advice of these two persons, Native Associations were now established in Zomba and Blantyre and within a few years similar bodies had been created in most of the other southern districts. Native Associations made a late appearance in the central region and then functioned for only a short period; while no such organizations were started in Yaoland. These latter areas were to remain largely on the fringes of the new political developments. They possessed no base to support sustained political action being so bereft of the basic requirements of social mobilization. In the north and south, however,



durable secular vehicles had been set up by the late 1920s through which Africans in these regions were mainly to pursue their modern-style political activities during the two decades between the wars.

As the moving spirit behind these Native Associations, Levi Mumba played a key role in the proliferation of a network of such communities within the Protectorate.<sup>3</sup> By maintaining a prolific correspondence with leading Africans throughout Nyasaland<sup>4</sup> and by writing articles in the African vernacular newspaper, Zo Ona, Mumba was able to urge his fellows to organize themselves and to seek to better African conditions. Native Associations, he claimed, would be able to assist the colonial government to become "informed of native public opinion" and would also be of great benefit to "the native by representing him in all political matters, by keeping him informed of and explaining the object of

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3. The following are the Native Associations that I have been able to trace as having operated within Nyasaland: North Nyasa N.A. (N.N.N.A. - 1912); West Nyasa N.A. (W.N.N.A. - 1914); Mombera N.A. (M.N.A. - 1920); Nyasaland Southern Province N.A. (N.S.P.N.A. - 1923) later the Zomba Province N.A. (Z.P.N.A. - 1927); Blantyre N.A. (B.N.A. - 1924); Mlanje N.A. (M.J.N.A. - 1926); Central Province N.A. (C.P.N.A. - 1929); Chiradzulu District N.A. (C.D.N.A. - 1929); Kasungu N.A. (K.N.A. - 1930); Lower Shire N.A. (L.S.N.A. - 1931); Ncheu N.A. (N.N.A. - 1933); Cholo N.A. (C.N.A. - 1938). All dates refer to the year the Association was formed.
4. Mumba appears to have left a large part of his correspondence and personal papers to a son but this invaluable documentation seems to have been destroyed. Two close friends of Mumba, C.C. Chinula and I.M. Jere, have, however, kindly made available to me a number of his letters which they have retained over the years. Some of these letters are referred to in subsequent footnotes.

legislations new and already in force." There was, he insisted, "absolutely nothing treacherous" about such political groups; "their very formation is proof, if one be wanted, that the way native interests are being looked after is not satisfactory in that the natives are not consulted, and this has raised a desire to have a say in matters touching them." This growing African desire "to have a say" in matters affecting their lives was made clear by Mumba in another passage:

"TO OUR RULERS, THE WHITE PEOPLE, I say - we thank you for having brought us peace and prosperity which have raised us to this stage. But the civilization which you have taught us forces us to aspire to greater things and we ask for your sympathy in our undertaking. Those of you who are looking after native interests should take special interest in these Associations and keep in close touch with them, encourage them by getting through them native opinion regarding any new legislation and so guide them aright in their attempt to have a say in such matters." 5

Miss Margery Perham has written of East Africa that "after a few early and usually very local acts of resistance and rebellion in all the territories, the African peoples were outwardly acquiescent and politically passive."<sup>6</sup> Recent research has completely disproved the validity of this statement for East Africa. Similarly, it can be argued for Nyasaland that after the Chilembwe Rising manifestations of African political initiative did

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5. All quotations in this paragraph are from L.Z. Mumba, op. cit., p.1.

6. Vincent Harlow and E.M. Chilver assisted by Alison Smith, eds., History of East Africa (Oxford, 1965), Vol.2, Introduction by Margery Perham, p.xv.



not decline but found renewed expression in the activities of the Native Associations. These political groups displayed a growing sense of independent self-confidence which may possibly have found its basis in the increasing importance during the inter-war period of peasant agriculture but was probably due more to the prestige and assurance that the leaders of these Associations drew from the fact that they were successful pioneers of the new ways of life. The organizers of Native Associations were the early product of a new order that was arising and looked forward to taking what they considered to be their rightful place within the new society. Through the creation of Native Associations, educated Africans hoped that the government would now seek to consult them before making decisions on matters directly affecting the lives of the indigenous population. "The natives of the country" argued Mumba, "should be taken into the confidence of the government as His Majesty's subjects like all others." "(We) are aware that natives are considered as children in these matters, and so they are, but it is as children when they can better be initiated into what is demanded of them when they grow up."<sup>7</sup> They wanted, for example, the government to refer bills on African matters to the Native Associations and receive suggestions from them "as they do with Europeans." "If this is done it would create a mutual feeling of trust and though in certain matters we may not see eye to eye, and it is an impossibility to

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7. Nat. 12/3, L.Z. Mumba to C.S., 10 April 1935, M.N.A., Zomba.

do so in this world, yet the benefit derived will compensate for the differences."<sup>8</sup> And even when they were not consulted, associationists vigorously asserted African aspirations and grievances and exerted pressure on the colonial authority to better African conditions. Native Associations in Nyasaland between the wars were an explicit expression of African political initiative and indigenous determination not to accept submissively the colonial situation.<sup>9</sup>

Non-tribal in purpose and outlook, the Associations, whose meetings were transacted entirely in English, were led by new men - primary school teachers, clerks in government and commercial offices and ministers of religion - fairly well-educated persons who were predominantly the products of the two major Scottish missions. A few of them had had experience of conditions outside the Protectorate but the majority of them, particularly the leading Association officials, had always lived and worked within Nyasaland. Yet they all shared common values and appealed to loyalties that "were those of common membership of an embryonic national entity."<sup>10</sup>

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8. Memorandum by L.Z. Mumba, chairman of the Representative Committee of Northern Province Native Associations, to the Hilton-Young Commission on Closer Union, in Memoranda and other papers circulated to the Commission, Vol.4, F.C.O. Library, London.

9. Three earlier discussions of the politics of Native Associations in Nyasaland are contained in Richard Gray, The Two Nations (London, 1960), pp.168-178; Robert I. Rotberg, The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), Chap.5; and J. van Velsen, "Some Early Pressure Groups in Malawi," in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown, eds., The Zambesian Past (Manchester, 1966), pp.376-412.

10. J. van Velsen, op. cit., p.381.



In no way did the Native Associations attempt to preserve tribal identities; they were, as their names suggested, district in character and successfully transcended the pale of ethnic loyalties. Although some were based upon tribal areas, such as the W.N.N.A. among the lakeside Tonga, their activities were distinctly non-tribal in orientation. Nor were members of these bodies entirely the products of the two main Scottish missions though these comprised the bulk of their membership and played the key roles in their development. An Association like the C.D.N.A., for instance, included adherents of the Blantyre Mission, the Montfort Marist Fathers, the Providence Industrial Mission as well as members of other smaller sects. Tribalism and religion were therefore of little consequence in the character and politics of the Native Associations.

Structurally, the Associations were bureaucratic in form with a president, a general secretary, a treasurer and other officials specialized according to function. All were formal organizations with written constitutions and procedures for the accomplishment of business. This was not mere show. Type-written minutes of meetings were regularly circulated to all paid-up members; elections were held periodically; and office-bearers removed for any misdeeds. Even such a well-known and American-educated person like Frederick Gresham Njilima, a son of Duncan Njilima, could be dismissed.<sup>11</sup>

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11. F.G. Njilima attended a high school in Mississippi and colleges in Kentucky. He served with the British army in France and was wounded in action. For details see S51/2/1, Smith to C.O., 28 March 1922, M.N.A., Zomba.

In 1925, Njilima had his appointment as Secretary of the N.S.P.N.A. "terminated" for "displaying little interest for the work of the Association and many times you did not attend meetings as you ought to have been doing and more particularly since you wilfully spent...money belonging to this body, on your private affairs."<sup>12</sup>

According to Levi Mumba, "In order to get immediate hearing from the authorities in local matters affecting adversely, or having a hard bearing on the African community, the organization of Native Associations have been made with due regard to Administrative Districts in the first place."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the Associations presented their demands and views to the District Commissioners for transmission to the central secretariat in Zomba in the hope that they would be able to influence the central government as well, particularly on issues of an extra-district or territorial nature. It was hoped that such a dual approach - exerting pressure on the district and the central administration - would presage the incorporation of district associations into one national-wide movement. In 1924, Mumba proffered the hope that "before long these associations would assume national importance by amalgamation under a central body." As early as 1923, "negotiations were started among the associations of the Northern Province with a view to

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12. NS1/3/5, R. Namate, Vice-President of N.S.P.N.A., to F.N. Gresham, 23 November 1925, M.N.A., Zomba.

13. L.Z. Mumba to H. Selby Msimang, General Secretary of All African Convention, Johannesburg, 8 March 1937, I.M. Jere papers. The underlining is mine.



amalgamation."<sup>14</sup> Such a unification was not realized at the time but a Representative Committee of Northern Province Native Associations (R.C.N.P.N.A.) was formed in the south at Zomba in the following year. Under the chairmanship of Mumba, the Committee was composed of members of the three northern Associations who were working mainly as civil servants in the government offices located in the capital. The Committee was granted a mandate to represent these northern bodies, "to act for us by presenting the native point of view to the Government."<sup>15</sup> With Professor J. van Velsen we may regard the R.C.N.P.N.A. as the "forerunner" of the later territorial-wide Nyasaland African Congress, in that it "functioned more like a national pressure group" than as an institution debating solely northern grievances and subjects.<sup>16</sup> Its manifold interests encompassed the whole range of Malawi society,<sup>17</sup> and because of its close relations with both northern and southern Native Associations it helped to promote political ties on a

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14. L.Z. Mumba (Native Associations), *op. cit.*, p.1.

15. My date of the founding of the R.C.N.P.N.A. is based on an article on this organization in the Bantu Mirror (Bulawayo), 8 August 1936, p.1. This issue also contains photographs of Levi Mumba and the Representative Committee. I am indebted to I.M. Jere (a secretary and chairman of the Committee during the 1920s and 1930s) for showing me his copy of this particular issue. See S1/3263/23, which mentions the R.C.N.P.N.A. in the attendance list at a meeting of the N.S.P.N.A. held on 21 November 1925. See also Nat. 12/3 for authorisations from the three northern Native Associations to the Representative Committee to represent them. Both of these references are to files in the M.N.A., Zomba.

16. J. van Velsen, *op. cit.*, p.379.

17. See Nat. 12/3, M.N.A., Zomba for examples of this national approach

national scale.

Interaction between the Associations and informal co-operation among their members were also common, which added to the growing cohesiveness of African protest. This was evident from the attendance at meetings of followers from different groups, their frequent exchanging of minutes and resolutions, and the identical nature of their constitutions which contained as one of their objects "to keep in touch with other similar Native Associations." Again, Levi Mumba remarked that such co-operation was essential for "any representations to the Government made without first consulting one or more of these organizations are likely to meet with conflicting views which may have been expressed by them."<sup>18</sup> As far as I am aware, despite the fact that Native Associations debated many common issues, at no time were resolutions passed by any group incompatible with those adopted by other bodies.

Native Associations provided convenient platforms for the airing and discussion of African grievances and viewpoints, debating on an impressive range of subjects, from relatively minor district topics to issues of fundamental national importance such as that of closer union of Nyasaland with the two Rhodesias. Southern Associations, functioning in an area where land alienation to white planters had been extensive, held numerous

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18. L.Z. Mumba (Native Associations), op. cit., p.1.



discussions on problems arising from scarcity of land, the poor living and working conditions of labourers on private estates, racial discrimination and other features consequent upon the settlement of Europeans. Native Associations operated in most of the southern districts<sup>19</sup> but the most durable and important ones were the two based in the townships of Blantyre and Zomba, which were run by a combination of civil servants, mission teachers, pastors and small businessmen. In the northern region, European settler intrusion was of little consequence and the pattern of discrimination therefore less thoroughgoing than in the Shire Highlands. But economic opportunities for work were extremely limited and the northern tribesmen were forced either to continue concentrating on subsistence farming or migrate abroad in search of employment. Northern Native Associations<sup>20</sup> thus urged government to promote the conditions for rural and agricultural development and pointed to the economic and social evils consequent upon the migration of thousands of men to the labour markets of Central and South Africa.

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19. The following files in the M.N.A., Zomba are concerned with the activities of the southern Native Associations: S1/3263/23; S1/2104/19; NS1/3/5; Nat.12/3; N.S.P.N.A. later the Z.P.N.A.  
S1/3263/23; NS1/3/2; NSP1/13/1: B.N.A. and M.J.N.A.  
S1/1598/29; NS1/3/3: C.D.N.A.  
NS1/3/4: L.S.N.A.  
NSE 1/2/3: C.N.A.
20. The following files in the M.N.A., Zomba relate to the northern Native Associations:  
S1/1481/19; NC1/3/4; NC1/3/6: N.N.N.A.  
S1/2065/19; NC1/3/4-6: W.N.N.A.  
S1/210/20; NC1/3/4-5; NNM1/13/1; NN1/4/1; M.N.A.

They called for improvements in the extent of communications and the distribution and number of markets and also asked for the introduction of agricultural instructors to teach the people better methods of farming. Northern Associations had their base in the rural areas and were led by teachers and pastors who worked mainly within the extensive Livingstonia Mission network in the region. In the central region, a few meetings were held by the C.P.N.A. and some other Associations<sup>21</sup> which forwarded resolutions to the government on a variety of subjects. The C.P.N.A. asked for the provision of more markets and agricultural instructors, demanded improved levels of education in the region, and sought to obtain a reduction of rental obligations of African storekeepers. The Association, which met in Lilongwe, does not appear to have had any initial links with Native Associations elsewhere in the Protectorate as is evident from the differently-worded constitution it adopted. Its membership was composed of a number of local traders but it was directed by a Tonga businessman, G.S. Mwase, whose transfer to Blantyre to work in government service led to the C.P.N.A. becoming moribund. Similarly, Native Associations in Kasungu and Ncheu organized a few meetings but soon foundered. The foundations for sustained and

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21. The following files in the M.N.A., Zomba relate to the central region Native Associations:  
S1/247/36; NC1/23/1; NC4/1/1; NC1/3/2: C.P.N.A.  
NC1/3/3: K.N.A.  
NC1/3/5: N.N.A.



effective organization were lacking in the central region in terms of leadership and political awareness.

Aside from matters of local or regional importance, Native Associations frequently debated topics of national interest on which they passed similar types of resolutions. There were constant demands for more and better social services with the Africans' contribution to the Protectorate's revenue being especially emphasized. Such demands were incessantly for improved educational facilities and the need for more and better government hospitals. Together with education, economic development was the subject of most persistent concern to the Associations. Government was continuously urged to provide the necessary infrastructure or else Nyasaland could never hope to develop economically. In another vein, they protested against laws which they believed were discriminatory and condemned the actions of government agents when they were felt to have behaved illegally.<sup>22</sup> In all this the R.C.N.P.N.A., led and guided by Mumba, was in the forefront. As a link between northern and southern Associations; because of its proximity to the centre of government; and through its national interests, it undoubtedly helped to keep the various bodies abreast with new political developments as well as developing territorial concerns among their leaders. The R.C.N.P.N.A. was beginning slowly to move in the direction of centralizing the activities of the Native Associations

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22. See J. van Velsen, op. cit., pp.331-404 for a more detailed discussion of topics raised and debated by Native Associations.

even though on an informal level.

### Levi Mumba and the character of Native Associations

Since the Native Associations revolved round Levi Zililo Mumba to a very important extent, he deserves a close attention. Little is known about his early life. But from a very brief introduction by the Rev. T. Cullen Young to an article penned by Mumba himself,<sup>23</sup> we know that he was born about 1884 of mixed Ngoni and Senga origin and that he grew up near Ekwendeni in the old Mombera's district (now Mzimba). He received his early education at the local Free Church school and had, by 1902, reached the highest class then available for general education of Africans at the Overtoun Institution. On completing his standard six in October 1903,<sup>24</sup> he gained brief employment in the office of the veteran and distinguished Dr. Laws of Livingstonia. But when a commercial class was launched at the Institution in 1904, Mumba was encouraged to enrol for the course. He was, reported Cullen Young, a "brilliant pupil" and rapidly acquired his certificate in book-keeping and other subjects. Re-employed by the Mission as an assistant, he "proved to be of immense value" in "all the business work" of the Church of which he became an elder in the

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23. An African (Levi Mumba), "The Religion of My Fathers," The International Review of Missions, 19 (1930), Introduction by T. Cullen Young, p.362.

24. For further details of Mumba's educational performances at the Overtoun Institution, see the Institution's Boys Register, Vol.1, entry No.156, Church of Scotland Office, Edinburgh.



local congregation. In 1911, however, Mumba took a second wife. Banished from the Free Church, he now found work at the government hospital in Karonga and during the 1914-18 War served with the Red Cross in Tanganyika. In 1919 he re-joined government service and was transferred to Zomba in 1923.

Mumba was at the forefront of inter-war African political activity in Nyasaland. He attended meetings of several Native Associations, espoused his demands for African betterment at such gatherings and in conversation with government officials, and expressed his ideas and views in a stream of lucidly-composed memoranda to the colonial authorities. The striking array of items that Mumba discussed and debated covered the whole range of government policy and clearly show that he was thinking more in terms of 'national' interests than in terms of particularistic regional or tribal issues. Some idea of this national focus and Mumba's lively interest in his country's problems can be obtained from the evidence which he gave on behalf of the R.C.N.P.N.A. to the Hilton-Young Commission in 1928.

"We natives of Nyasaland are men of ambition, capable of development and enterprise. We are in fact crying aloud for this, even seeking opportunities outside our own land to the detriment of our family relations and territorial welfare....

The economic pinch is driving us out. Even in our own country we are merely used as labour for the Whitemen.... We have got land, we are healthy, strong, and are able to work, but it is useless to cultivate them beyond our annual needs as there are no markets for surplus produce. We want to be given facilities for development near our own homes, given markets with good prices for crops grown by

ourselves. We want stores near our own homes run by natives, encouragement to them in the initial stage and to those who wish to start other independent trades. For those who are not able to produce on their own and have to work for others we demand good wages and good treatment, food and proper houses, as is found in other Colonies and Protectorates; these are real needs for us." 25

This evidence also displays Mumba's radical and inquiring turn of mind. Clearly he was the most articulate African spokesman of his generation in Nyasaland. His powerful oratory supported by his stature, ability and drive, enabled him to earn the confidence of his fellow educated Africans throughout the Protectorate. Even among colonial officials, Mumba commanded respect though his searching criticisms must have provoked some irritation in government circles. He headed various African deputations to the colonial authorities, submitted memoranda to a number of commissions, and was asked in 1933 to serve as the first African on the government's Advisory Committee on Education. Prior to the first meeting he attended of this body, Mumba circulated a memorandum urging the immediate introduction of secondary education in Nyasaland and from then on the subject was a regular feature every year on the Committee's agenda. It appears that Mumba's persistent demands for further schooling backed up by the petitions of the Native Associations were instrumental in the government formulating plans to meet these needs.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Memoranda and other papers circulated to the Hilton Young Commission, op. cit., Vol.4.

26. Trevor Coombe, "The Origins of Secondary Education in Zambia, 3. Anatomy of a Decision, 1937-1939," African Social Research, 5 (1968), p.381.



In many ways, Mumba's articulation of African educational needs displayed his deep concern for the interests of all types of Africans and depicted his great confidence in their ability to better themselves if provided with the necessary opportunities. His memorandum to the 1933 Advisory Committee makes clear his views of the potentialities of an active policy of development as did also his evidence to the 1928 Hilton-Young Commission. In it he not only called for secondary education but also a rural and vocational emphasis in school curricula to enable Africans at all levels to become better equipped to improve their conditions of life.

"We are agreed (he wrote) that the policy in education should be based on the fact that the majority of us will have to find means of living in agriculture, which has been our industry from time immemorial, to which should be added present day industries to be undertaken by us independently in our villages and in towns. We think that if this is done, something near to the outlook in life which we see among Europeans and Indians today might be achieved which would in turn minimize the danger of unemployment.... Hitherto the aim in education has been to turn out men and women with abilities to work as employees of Europeans with the result that the supply has exceeded the demand. (Those who are unable to find employment) either go outside Nyasaland to seek work or are absorbed in the village communities with little benefit to themselves or their localities. It is not their fault but the education which has failed to arouse the innate self activities to sustain an independent economic effort."

Whereas leading African spokesmen in neighbouring territories were primarily urging the need for greater emphasis on the academic and literary sides of the school

curricula,<sup>27</sup> Mumba saw the need for an increasing rural and vocational emphasis as well. The following vigorous plea concluded the 1933 memorandum:

"Educate for the employer, educate for service with tribal communities, but MOST OF ALL EDUCATE THE MASSES TO STAND ON THEIR OWN FEET. Give us this chance and I can assure you that within a period of a comparatively few years the response of the Nyasaland African will be surprisingly great." 28

This concern for the masses was reflected in the activities of the Native Associations. Although essentially elitist bodies they were not self-serving concerns. They also saw their function as representing the views of the ordinary people to the government. Many of the subjects they raised for discussion concerned the interests of the rural African whose problems and needs were constantly brought to the attention of the colonial authorities.

Despite the elements of radicalism in his speeches and writings as well as his self-confident and highly pro-African spirit, Mumba also symbolized the essentially gradualist approach of the inter-war African political leaders in Nyasaland. He constantly stressed constitutionality, moderation of expression and political rectitude attempting to ensure that Europeans would not be unduly

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27. Terence Ranger, "African attempts to control education in East and Central Africa, 1900-1939," Past and Present, 32 (1965), pp.57-85.

28. Nat. 12/3, L.Z. Mumba to C.S., 30 October 1933, M.N.A., Zomba. The report of the Education Department for the year 1944, p.1 made the following comment on Mumba's educational efforts and activities: "He was a most able and zealous member of the (Advisory) Committee from 1933 to the last meeting and was deeply concerned with all matters affecting African education."



antagonized by African political activities and criticisms. This desire to minimize apprehension among whites went even as far as Mumba not wearing a hat and shoes in their presence. With regard to the political strategy to be followed, this was carefully adumbrated by Mumba in the following terms:

"TO MY FELLOW NATIVES I would say, though the situation is difficult, we are on the right track. We have made mistakes in the past and will make them in future; that is not a drawback because by making them we learn how to do better. But we must cultivate patience, moderation of expression, and above all we must be loyal. That is the only way we can hope to win the confidence of the white people." 29

The "mistakes" of the past was probably a reference to the Chilembwe Rising. In the wake of the 1915 insurrection, it was essential for African political leaders to adopt an approach that was not only non-violent and open but also one that was, as far as possible, loyal and faithful to the colonial order. The best way to advance African interests, Mumba believed, was to act constitutionally, be temperate and seek to co-operate as fully as possible with the colonial government. Even in 1941, he could write to the chairman of the R.C.N.P.N.A.: "Thank you for copy of your memorandum to Government. I think it is moderately worded as not to give any offence."<sup>30</sup> His policy was essentially one of reform through co-operation.

Yet there were occasions when the Native Associations were very outspoken in their condemnation of

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29. L.Z. Mumba (Native Associations), *op. cit.*, p.1.

30. L.Z. Mumba to I.M. Jere, 2 May 1941, I.M. Jere papers.

particular features of the colonial situation. By no means were they servile and their criticisms could be pungently ventilated, especially when matters of African pride and self-respect were involved. The most notable example of this occurred when the Associations protested against Section 129 of the 1929 Code of Criminal Law which they claimed was discriminatory in that it penalized illicit sexual intercourse between a white woman and a black man. So vehement were their denunciations of this law<sup>31</sup> that the District Commissioner of Karonga came out with the following interesting remarks:

"It is a peculiar thing that almost every highly educated native of the Livingstonia Mission is politically minded and race conscious and always on the look out for some stigma.

At the back of their minds is an intolerance of the Europeans and their creed is 'Africa for the Africans'. This product is proof positive that education at Livingstonia has been conducted on wrong lines in the past, though the Mission is not entirely to blame. There is a continuous contact with South Africa and leading native members of the Mission here are kept well informed concerning native labour organizations and political organizations in that country." <sup>32</sup>

But these connexions with politicians in South Africa do not seem to have introduced any important strains of militant radicalism into Malawi African politics in the years between the wars. Levi Mumba was a close friend of the Tonga, Clements Kadalie, the founder of South Africa's largest African labour movement. On his

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31. See, for example, S1/1481/19, I. Mkondowe, Secretary of N.N.N.A., to C.S., 29 September 1930, M.N.A., Zomba.

32. ibid., D.C., Karonga, to P.C.N.P., 27 January 1931.



occasional trips to Nyasaland, Kadalie would stay with Mumba in Zomba but the latter was never influenced to eschew his gradualist and reformist approaches of achieving political and social change. Similarly, Isa Macdonald Lawrence, who was sentenced in 1926 to three years' hard labour for importing into Nyasaland copies of Kadalie's newspaper, The Worker's Herald, and issues of the strident American Negro organ, The Negro World, was not able to infuse politically-minded Africans in the Protectorate with his radicalism. During the 1920s and 1930s, Lawrence was a member of the B.N.A. and C.D.N.A. but was unable to introduce any extremist trends into the politics of these Associations. To be sure, such external connexions must have stimulated race pride among the associationists but did not have any significant impact on the approach and strategy of the Native Associations.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that because there were no protests against Nyasaland's colonial status or demands for 'freedom' that the associationists accepted a subordinate role for Africans in the colonial state. Their political strategy may have been moderate and constitutional but their ideology was one of incipient nationalism whereby they refused to accept fully the idea of European dominance. The Native Associations directly and persistently questioned the

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33. See file S2/28/24 in the M.N.A., Zomba for Lawrence's arrest and sentence. See also The Nyasaland Times, 24 September 1926, p.3, and C.O.525/125, no.33079, Bowring to C.O., 20 June 1928, P.R.O., London.

policies and actions of government and rejected the racial and authoritarian scaffolding that was erected over them. They sought to achieve reforms and change without abandoning their dignity and independence. Thus when occasions arose which affected African self-respect and pride, the Associations could become highly critical and very outspoken. Generally, however, they followed Mumba's approach and remained constitutional in their methods and moderate in their demands and criticisms. When the moderate tenor of associationists did give way to more extremist notes, and this was extremely rare, then this was either an expression of deep concern over particularly serious issues or an indication of deep alienation with white rule and white people. The protest over section 129 of the 1929 Code of Criminal Law had provided one example of an issue provoking serious criticism from the Native Associations. Another example occurred in the same year when the W.N.N.A. commenced censuring the government over its educational and land policies at a time when its formidable Secretary, the Rev. Yesaya Z. Mwase, was becoming increasingly disillusioned with Europeans.

From 1920 to 1929 the W.N.N.A. had met regularly and discussed constitutionally the various grievances affecting the local Tonga peoples. The passage of numerous resolutions had provided no hint of extremism and the tenor of deliberation had never been unduly hostile or subversive. Quite suddenly, however, in a



series of meeting held in 1929, the Association began admonishing the colonial government and local Free Church missionaries in a highly stickling manner.<sup>34</sup> There can be no doubt that Mwase's growing disenchantment and conflicts with the Livingstonia Mission, from which he was to break as an ordained minister in 1932, provided part of the background to this new militancy. But this was also a period of mounting alarm among the Tonga regarding the security of their land. Persistent rumours of possible land alienation in the district combined with studiously vague statements by government officials led to the W.N.N.A. voicing vociferous criticisms of the government's land policy and the activities of European planters in the country. As Secretary of the Association, Mwase was the leading light in this new vigorous denunciation of white authorities - official, planting and missionary. It was he who composed the minutes of the W.N.N.A. which were transmitted to the government and the language he adopted, with the approval of the Association, was immoderate and outspoken.

Officials in the Zomba secretariat took exception to some of the resolutions passed by "this very vocal society". The Senior Provincial Commissioner deemed Mwase's attitude as "offensive and impertinent" and asked for more information about the constitution and membership of the W.N.N.A.<sup>35</sup> In his reply, the District Commissioner

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34. S1/2065/19, Minutes of meetings of the W.N.N.A. held on 9 February 1929 and 1-2 May 1929, M.N.A., Zomba.

35. ibid., official minutes nos. 43 (dated 25 May 1929) and 49 (30 August 1930) and A.C.S. to A.P.C.N.P., 31 May 1929.

could only report that headmen and councillors were members of the body and that they had an equal voice with such cantankerous commoners as Mwase.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Provincial Commissioner felt obliged to issue a warning to the Association and its Secretary that "its existence as a recognized Association may be imperilled, unless a more moderate tone and more balanced reasoning is discernible in its minutes."<sup>37</sup> But the Association still continued its new agitation for a clear decision on land matters, also calling for better conditions for Tonga workers on local European rubber estates and the provision of improved educational facilities by the government as the missionaries were unable to achieve much through lack of funds and personnel.<sup>38</sup> The accom<sup>m</sup>odationist manner expected of Native Associations was being seriously overreached. Officialdom now considered preventing participation by African civil servants in the activities of the W.N.N.A. Finally, it was decided that if the organization "continued in the way it has been for several months past" then recognition of it should be withdrawn.<sup>39</sup> Gradually, however, as concern over land subsided and no alienation to Europeans took place, the W.N.N.A. fell back into its previous constitutional line and no further official action against it was required.

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36. ibid., D.C., Chinteche, to P.C.N.P., 19 June 1929.

37. ibid., P.C.N.P. to W.N.N.A., 15 January 1930.

38. NC 1/3/5, Minutes of meeting of the W.N.N.A. held on 22 January 1930, M.N.A., Zomba.

39. ibid., D.C., Chinteche, to P.C.N.P., 11 June 1930 and P.C.N.P. to C.S., 11 August 1930.



Despite expressing an incipient nationalist orientation, Native Associations proved unsuccessful in their objectives. Improvements were achieved in minor types of matters but substantive changes in the character of the colonial government were not effected. Native Associations were never able to influence policy, especially in the major fields of economic and social development, in any significant way. Government also continued to refuse to refer bills on African matters to the Associations for consideration and nor did the missionaries responsible for African interests in the Legislative Council consult these groups for their views. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that government generally ignored petitions and resolutions from the Native Associations and turned a deaf ear to their protests.<sup>40</sup> In fact, officials were attentive to criticisms levelled by these bodies. Complaints were investigated and action taken to redress legitimate African grievances. Moreover, responsible advice was offered to the Associations and encouragement given to them to continue promoting African interests. Respectful consideration was also given to the suggestions and viewpoints of the Associations on the government's economic and social policies, and official replies often contained detailed reasons as to why greater development was not possible. But it was clear that new techniques were required if the political pressure of Native Associations was to be more effective.

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40. R.I. Rotberg, op. cit., pp.118-120 argues in this vein.

Native Associations were concerned with attempting to modify the colonial situation as it impinged upon African interests and did not threaten to overthrow the colonial status quo. At no time did they seek the political kingdom but instead resorted to constitutional methods in their attempts to politely, but not obsequiously, persuade government to better African conditions. As far as I am aware, no demands were made before 1938 with regard to African representation on the Legislative Council, their most extreme request being that an African should always be present at meetings at which Europeans discussed native affairs. The practical attainment of political power under their control was only dimly apprehended and seemed so very remote. Moreover, although the Associations operated like pressure groups, they never succeeded in commanding a mass following. Unskilled workers, traders and peasants may have attended some meetings but Native Associations remained essentially elitist bodies and never based themselves on wider sections of the African community. Although they saw themselves as representing the views of the bulk of the African peoples, their membership was limited to the educated elements.

Nevertheless, Native Associations are worthy of study, as they were the precursors of the Nyasaland African Congress and formed the backdrop to the rise of a territorial-wide political movement. Many of the associationists later comprised the leadership of the



N.A.C. Native Associations were the training ground, the organizational apprenticeship for those who were later to assume the direction of Congress. Nearly all the early leadership of the N.A.C. had held positions of responsibility and had been active in the protest politics of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the technical skills of running an organization - the keeping of minutes, maintenance of accounts, election of office-bearers, direction and control of meetings - were all gradually acquired. Associations also served as the chief agents of political socialization in that their leaders developed a substantive appreciation of political ideas from their numerous attempts to ameliorate African grievances. Finally, these voluntary associations contributed to the widening of African horizons of loyalty beyond the barriers of kin and village. They helped to combine the literate with the semi-literate, brought together the many ethnic and religious groups within a particular

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41. Some examples of this are: L.Z. Mumba (Secretary of the N.N.N.A. and later President of the R.C.N.P.N.A.) became the first President of the N.A.C.; J.F. Sangala (a leading member of the B.N.A. and Z.P.N.A. during the 1930s) became President of Congress in 1954; C.J. Matinga (Secretary of the B.N.A. and also a member of the Z.P.N.A.) became the second President of Congress; C.C. Chinula (Secretary of the M.N.A.) later became Vice-President of Congress; J.R.N. Chinyama (Secretary of the C.P.N.A.) was elected President of Congress in 1950; C.W. Mlanga (member of the executive committee of the B.N.A.) was subsequently a Secretary-General of the N.A.C.; I.M. Lawrence (member of the B.N.A. and the C.D.N.A.) was the first Treasurer-General of Congress; J.D. Phiri (Auditor of the R.C.N.P.N.A.) was later an Assistant Secretary General of Congress.

district, and enabled Congress leaders later to mobilize important segments of the population out of which the N.A.C. came to be established.

#### Native Associations, social change and the masses

During most of the inter-war years, conditions were not amenable for Native Associations to turn their organizations into genuine popular movements of political and social change. A number of factors in combination account for this situation. Of these contributory factors, perhaps the most important was the nature of British colonial policy. Up to the early 1930s, a basic tenet of imperial policy was that each British colony should live strictly within its own means; colonial governments were not to be provided with grants or loans to carry through modernization and economic development. This doctrine entailed a severe limitation upon the power of the Nyasaland Government to promote socio-economic change on a substantial scale. The government's ability to mount development programmes and expand social services was always highly uncertain for, under the circumstances, funds for such purposes were dependent upon whatever surpluses the export sector could extract from an unstable international market in primary products. Paucity of resources and the lack of any positive direction from the imperial government to occasion extensive changes in the lives of African peoples encouraged a conservative attitude towards change in African societies among British colonial officials. It was realized that large-



scale change would dispel the apathy which enabled a small number of white officers to rule millions of Africans, and might also overtax the capability of the government. As a result, throughout the entire gamut of official policy, there ran the theme that stability could be maintained with minimal effort by preserving the integrity of tribal society as intact as possible.

In its economic policy, the Nyasaland Government concentrated its efforts and limited resources upon the export sector rather than on stimulating internal development. The latter course would not only have required staff and finance that were not available but, more importantly, would have raised a potential conflict between economic needs and political priorities. The moving of sizeable numbers of Africans out of a subsistence and into a market economy would have necessitated far-reaching changes in their traditional ways of life. Fortunately for the government, the effects of large-scale migration of labour to Central and South Africa were not too profound a source of social innovation. For "the new experiences were dissipated, so to speak, outside the tribe. The returning workers took back little more than some cash, a few trade goods, and experiences not easily transmitted to their fellow tribesmen." The promotion of cash-crop agriculture, however, would have engendered extensive changes in the tribal structure and

traditional social system.<sup>42</sup> The same combination of financial limitations and political priorities also led to the colonial government devoting only limited resources to African education and developing an educational policy which ensured that Africans would play a useful role in their own tribal environment rather than attempt to transcend it. Major emphasis was placed upon primary education which was concerned mainly with imparting the rudiments of literacy, hygiene and agriculture, and little attention was given to post-primary training.<sup>43</sup> Again, the policy of administering Africans through chiefs was continued as it met the two prime requirements of limited expense and little disturbance of traditional society.

Native Associations, in their elitist forms, were therefore in no position to induce the colonial government to commit greater resources to economic and social development. The possibilities of mass mobilization to exert widespread and popular pressure on the colonial regime were also absent. Only a very small fraction of Africans had become involved in any form of social change which removed them in some way from traditional life. Even migrant workers were likely to remain very concerned

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42. The quotation and part of the above argument is from Hugh W. Stephens, The Political Transformation of Tanganyika 1920-67 (New York, 1968), pp.44ff.

43. C.O.525/119, Bowring to C.O., 25 January 1927, enclosure memorandum on Education in Nyasaland by the Director of Education, R.F. Gaunt, P.R.O., London. See also Trevor Coombe, "The Origins of Secondary Education in Zambia, 1. Policy-making in the Thirties," African Social Research, 3 (1967), pp.188-191.



in the politics of their rural tribal home as this was where they expected to find their ultimate security.<sup>44</sup> The mass of Africans therefore remained psychologically within the small-scale, self-contained subsistence economy of tribal life. According to Professor S.M. Lipset, it is in such conditions of stable poverty where individuals are not exposed to the possibilities of change that conservatism prevails.<sup>45</sup> The personal needs of ordinary Africans were thus not altered and the colonial government did not experience mass pressures for greater services and opportunities. The needs of such Africans could be adequately satisfied by tribal government. For the Native Associations, there was therefore popular indifference to political change.

Nor were there any serious external burdens imposed on the masses to provoke widespread rural disaffection. Production methods and land tenure, the most fundamental aspects of customary life, remained unaffected by direct governmental interference. Africans in the northern region, however, still found difficulties in meeting their tax liabilities from local employment or agriculture. But the existence of the economic safety-valve of migration abroad was of crucial importance in ensuring that mass discontent was not built up among northerners on this score. Land and labour grievances

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44. J. van Velsen, "Labour Migration as a Positive Factor in the Continuity of Tonga Tribal Society," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 8,3 (1960), pp.265-278.

45. Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (London, 1960), p. 63.

also remained an important source of African unrest in the Shire Highlands but they were left to simmer undisturbed eventually erupting in brief disorders during the 1940s and 1950s. The economic discontents of Africans resident on white estates were invariably voiced by the Native Associations but no decision was taken to lend leadership to the agitated tenants for the purposes of mass political action. It may be that because John Chilembwe had sought to mobilize the discontented on private estates, any similar attempts by the Native Associations would be suspect to the colonial authorities. Of equal importance may have been the fact that because they were not concerned with seeking the overthrow of the colonial order, the Native Associations were not moved to create mass organizations. Mumba and his colleagues believed that patient and constant pressure on government through the passage of resolutions and petitions would ultimately induce it to promote the desired political and social changes. Peasant grievances could be articulated but there was no need to build up a mass movement for organizational purposes.<sup>46</sup>

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46. For a discussion of why political associations in East Africa did not acquire mass followings during the inter-war period, and which is also relevant for Nyasaland, see J.M. Lonsdale, "Some Origins of Nationalism in East Africa," Journal of African History, 9,1 (1968), pp.136-140.



### Native Associations and African churches

For reasons which we shall subsequently explain, most of the Native Associations in the northern region were moribund by the mid-thirties. Just as these Associations were declining, however, a series of independent African churches were emerging in the region founded by persons who had been prominent in the activities of the secular pressure groups. These and other African churches in the Protectorate<sup>47</sup> require some examination mainly to discuss their relations with the Native Associations as well as to see if they played any important role in the development of African politics.

From late 1932 a group of ex-ordained ministers of the Livingstonia Mission started up a number of African churches in the three northern districts of Nyasaland. In part, their creation can be traced to such factors as resentment at the behaviour and attitudes of white missionaries; concern over the authoritarian tendency of the clergy; and a growing African desire to have a greater indigenous voice in the administration of the Church. Underlying all this was the mounting African criticism of Livingstonia's educational standards which had declined since the first world war, partly as a result of limited financial resources and partly because of a changing educational philosophy. As early as 1921, a future African

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47. For previous general discussions of inter-war African churches in Nyasaland, see R. Gray, op. cit., pp.145-9 and R.I. Rotberg, op. cit., Chap.6.

minister of the Free Church had detailed some of these grievances in a letter to the Livingstonia Mission Council. The African, claimed Y.M. Chibambo, was "not regarded as a co-worker with the missionary"; was "commonly called 'boy'"; possessed "no voice in the mission work"; and had no direct representation in the Mission Council. A list of African educational criticisms was also catalogued which stressed the low salaries and poor conditions of service for African teachers and their not being provided with adequate teaching materials as compared with their European counterparts.<sup>48</sup> Further factors of African discontent were outlined in a statement by the Rev. Yesaya Z. Mwase in which he gave his reasons for leaving the Livingstonia Mission. Mwase averred that missionaries "have not come into native lands to plant indigenous churches to be developed on the native and nation line but to make them their perpetual subjects under their permanent control." More fundamentally, he held the conviction that no alien missionaries could make institutionalized Christianity flourish in the Protectorate as a permanent establishment. "I wish" declared Mwase, "to naturalize and nationalize God, Christ faith in short Christianity. There is no say that object and goal of missionary enterprise is to naturalize and nationalize the Christianity to grow out of its own soil, having its own custom purified by the Gospel of Christ. An exotic

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48. Livingstonia Mission Council Minute Book, No.2, entry dated 19 July 1921. See appendix for letter by Yesaya M. Chibambo to Mission Council, n.d. (but 1921), Livingstonia Mission Archives, Livingstonia, Malawi.



Christianity will never take vital root in the life of the natives, it is a mistaken view to think that measures of introducing initiatives of the indigenous church shall be done by the missionaries themselves."<sup>49</sup>

After breaking with the mission in 1932, Mwase founded the Blackman's Church of God which is in Tongaland. His deep nationalist feelings and pride in his race were further demonstrated in a scheme he proposed called the Nyasaland Blackman's Educational Society. Although it never went beyond a paper venture, its aim was to "improve or develop the impoverished condition of the Blackman - religiously, morally, economically, physically and intellectually by starting a purely native controlled High School or College." In the meantime, two other African ministers, who unlike Mwase had been dismissed from the Livingstonia Mission, had formed their own churches. In November 1932, a month after he had been deposed for taking "Phemba" medicine, Yaphet M. Mkandawire founded his African Reformed Presbyterian Church near Deep Bay in the North Nyasa district; and, in 1934, Charles C. Chinula established the Eklesia Lanangwa (The Christianity of Freedom) in Mzimba. Chinula had been dismissed for adultery in 1930 but was restored to the mission church two years later. Subsequently, he decided to leave the mission because of the way "suspended people

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49. Unpublished manuscript by Yesaya Zerenje Mwase entitled "My essential and paramount reasons for working independently are as to effect:" dated 12 July 1933. I am indebted to Mr. J.C.W. Malifa for showing me his copy of this document.

were treated" by it. Sinners, he claimed, were punished too severely and the mission "lacked the forgiveness of Christ" in its dealings with fallen converts.<sup>50</sup>

In 1935, the three church leaders joined forces and designed a new united church which became known as the Mpingo Wa Afipa Wa Africa (The Blackman's Church of Africa Mission, Presbyterian). Having asserted their independence, the latent anti-European and anti-missionary elements seem to have been largely forgotten by the united church leaders. No doubt they were still there, but the independents were ready enough to seek help from the Department of Education and they remained on fairly friendly terms with some local missionaries and officials. The new church observed strictly Presbyterian codes of worship and ideas such as polygamy were completely rejected. Educationally, the church was not a great success. A few vernacular schools were set up at the three headquarters but they were not developed enough to attract much government assistance for many years. Funds were short and there was a lack of trained teachers.

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50. For details of some of the events leading to Mwase's break with Livingstonia, see Minutes of the Presbytery of North Livingstonia dated 27-8 July 1932; and for details of Chinula and Mkandawire being dismissed see the minutes for 27 November 1930 and 24 October 1932, Livingstonia Mission Archives. Further information on these churches is to be found in Miss. 12/10, Historical Survey of Native Controlled Missions operating in Nyasaland (December, 1940), M.N.A., Zomba. An incomplete copy of this report is also to be found in the M.C. Hoole papers, MSS. Afr.s.997 in Rhodes House, Oxford. I am indebted to Dr. K.J. McCracken of the University of Stirling for providing me with a photocopy of the whole of this important report. I am also deeply grateful to the Rev. C.C. Chinula for his many discussions on inter-war African church activity and for his two memoranda to me on the formation of his own church movement.



Politically, too, the church was of little consequence. The leaders played some part in local chiefs councils and maintained their contacts with the remnants of the northern Native Associations and the R.C.N.P.N.A. in Zomba. But no attempt was made to use the church for the promotion of political interests. The teachings and activities of the leaders show the devotion with which the church, precisely as an ecclesiastical - and not as a political - institution was served. Nor did the movement become the basis for a national-wide African church as may have been hoped. This latter role seems also to have been envisaged for the African National Church which had been formed in 1929 with congregations initially in the North Nyasa and West Nyasa districts.

By the 1930s, branches of the A.N.C. were to be also found in the Mzimba, Lilongwe and Ncheu districts but it failed ever to penetrate into the southern region. The founders of the church, S.K. Mkandawire, Paddy F. Nyasulu and I.M. Kondowe, were educated northerners who had been dismissed from the Livingstonia Mission for marrying second wives. The constitution of the A.N.C. stated it was the aim of the church to "fit in with manners and customs of the people and not that it should impose on the African the unnecessary and impracticable method of European countries." Polygamy was therefore approved and African traditions, laws and customs given due respect. The aim of the A.N.C. was to appeal to all Africans, "The uplifting of the African mass taking in its rise the old people who are at present being left out by

religions of the north and its civilization, as well as winning those who are considered bad because of polygamy and drink, and are refused any latent qualities for doing good any more."<sup>51</sup>

The highly impressive statement of the constitution and principles of the A.N.C. appears to have been drafted mainly by Levi Mumba who, it will be remembered, had been dismissed from Livingstonia for polygamy. Mumba and the A.N.C. leaders, who were also active members of the N.N.N.A., may have had some sort of conception of the role which a national church could play in the creation of a national consciousness. Africans of all tribes would be able to join the church because its doctrines were not alien to African traditions and ideas. But the A.N.C. was never able to make effective its national claims. Lack of funds restricted its influence to a few areas in the northern region where it enjoyed fairly considerable popular support. A few schools were started and some financial assistance received from the government but its educational schemes were not very successful. Politically, as well, the A.N.C. was quite active though not in any formal way. Links were developed with the N.N.N.A. and Kondowe and Nyasulu were prominent leaders

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51. The text of the 'Belief, Constitution, and Aims' of the African National Church is contained in Monica Wilson, Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa (London, 1959), pp. 191-5 which also has a good discussion on the church. See also T.O. Ranger, The African churches of Tanzania (Nairobi, 1969), Historical Association of Tanzania Paper, No. 5, pp. 16-20.



of that organization. Some of the Church's adherents may have joined the Association and it is of interest to note that this was the only northern body that kept functioning, though intermittently, through the 1930s.

There were two further churches in the central and southern regions which provided another example of African self-help in educational and religious matters, though both were connected with American Negro organizations. John Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission was re-opened in 1926 under Dr. D.S. Malekebu, a Chiradzulu African who had been trained as a medical practitioner in the United States. Malekebu was the founder and leading member of the C.D.N.A., which was virtually an extension of the local P.I.M. congregations. This was always a rather cautious Association and with its breakup in 1934 Malekebu completely eschewed political activity and concentrated his efforts in developing the P.I.M. schools and churches under conditions of some financial strain. In 1924, a Cewa from Kasungu, the Rev. H.M. Phiri, introduced the African Methodist Episcopal Church from Northern Rhodesia into his home area in central Nyasaland. Once again a few schools were started, aided by a limited government grant and small sums from Negro backers in the United States. But the funds proved insufficient and Phiri was severely hindered in mounting any important educational developments. As with the P.I.M., polygamy and beer drinking were forbidden and orthodox religious doctrines were pursued. Both churches operated within the conservative framework of hard work and self-help and were

essentially non-political in nature.<sup>52</sup>

In many ways, however, this new wave of African churches throughout the Protectorate represented another form of African protest at the colonial situation and symbolized the religious strand in the growth of African nationalism. They were all eloquent manifestations of protest against white domination and the status of inferiority. They all depicted a growing African desire to control their own affairs and have a greater say in the working out of the new order. None of the churches caused the colonial authorities any serious apprehension but they were nonetheless symptomatic of an undercurrent of frustration and grievance. Their failure to promote successful educational and evangelical concerns enhanced this resentment which ultimately found an outlet in political protest by secular movements. A number of these church leaders - Chinula, Mkandawire, Kondowe, Nyasulu and Phiri - were to participate in political activity with the Nyasaland African Congress during the 1940s and early 1950s. But the churches themselves were in no position to offer an effective challenge to the Europeans and, more important, were very far from being able to unite in one inclusive movement. Unlike some other countries in colonial Africa, therefore, political developments were to proceed in Nyasaland without any important background of support from independent religious movements.

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52. For a more detailed discussion of these two churches, see Miss. 12/10, op. cit.,



Even the Watch Tower movement, which aroused much anxiety among colonial officials, came to eschew direct political action. After the Chilembwe Rising, government had severely suppressed Watch Tower, restricting the importation of its literature into the Protectorate and forbidding it to open new churches. Nevertheless, Watch Tower continued to operate, albeit covertly, and large quantities of documentation entered the country secretly. Concerned about the dangers of driving the movement further underground, the government decided from 1922 to grant it limited recognition by permitting a controlled erection of churches and schools. It was felt that Watch Tower could thus be "more easily and closely watched."<sup>53</sup> During this second phase, despite the fact that for many years it had no European representatives, Watch Tower gained a fairly considerable support under African control and gradually spread southwards into the Shire Highlands from the northern region.<sup>54</sup> Companies of Watchtowerites existed in most districts of Nyasaland by the 1930s though there was no cohesion between them. Watch Tower literature was received from abroad and used for preaching but no schools were opened. But it is doubtful if Watch Tower,

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53. C.O.626/5, Executive Council Minutes dated 28 April 1922 and C.O.525/101, Smith to C.O., 5 June 1922, P.R.O., London.

54. C.O.525/116, Rankine to C.O., 15 September 1926, P.R.O., London. See also J.R. Hooker, "Witnesses and Watchtower in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland," Journal of African History, 6,1 (1965), pp.91-106.

despite its initially large following, played an important mass role in Nyasaland as in some neighbouring countries and it seems to have turned into a minority religion with growing reactionary beliefs. From the political point of view, with Watch Tower adherents passively expecting the advent of the millennium and not believing that it required active assistance, the movement came to pursue a rather obstructive and reactionary ideology. It criticized and opposed not only the colonial government but the idea of government at all. Its solutions, however, depended not on direct political action but on divine intervention at the millennium.<sup>55</sup> The political future of Nyasaland was to lie with the new men who still remained members of the two Scottish missions.

#### Native Associations, chiefs and government

Though regarding the traditional authorities as the major indigenous political mechanisms, the government had, during the 1920s, welcomed the Native Associations and recognized their existence provided they were "properly conducted and reasonably representative of local native opinion."<sup>56</sup> Any initial doubts that the government may have entertained about them were soon allayed by its acceptance of the advice of the venerable Livingstonia missionary, Dr. Robert Laws, that "the vast multitude of the natives cannot be expected to remain dumb with regard

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55. Miss. 12/10, op. cit.,

56. S1/1529/26, A.C.S. to all P.Cs., 13 November 1926, M.N.A., Zomba.



to their own affairs, and safetyvalves for the expression of their opinions are needed in the interests of peace and safety."<sup>57</sup> The authorities had been particularly concerned about whether the W.N.N.A. "would be likely to strengthen and add cohesion to the Watch Tower sect" which had a "considerable following" in the district and which "has in the past been lacking in direction and organization."<sup>58</sup> Assured by Laws that the West Nyasa associationists were not connected with Watch Tower, the W.N.N.A. was then recognized and informed by the Governor that he would "at all times give due consideration to any representation (it) may make respecting the general Native Community, its welfare and prosperity."<sup>59</sup>

Government was also beginning to consider associating the literate element with the traditional authorities. The M.N.A. was informed in 1922 that

"His Excellency fully appreciates the interest your Association takes in all those matters affecting the welfare of the people, and he is glad to read the minutes of your meetings. He asks you all as educated men with better knowledge of what is required to advance the moral and material well being of the inhabitants to assist in the attainment of this by the example you set and the influence you can bring to bear on those amongst whom you live who are not so enlightened." 60

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57. S1/2065/19, Laws to A.C.S., 12 January 1920. See also extract from the Mombera District Report of January 1920 in which the Resident, Mzimba stated that it was his "intention to give the (M.N.A.) every encouragement to speak frankly of native affairs and grievances. It should, on some subjects, be able to give useful information and advice and its existence should be a valuable safety valve for the escape of grievances along the right channel." Both in M.N.A., Zomba.

58. *ibid.*, A.C.S. to Laws, 5 December 1919.

59. *ibid.*, A.C.S. to Resident, Chinteché, 28 February 1920 and minute by Governor Smith dated 26 February 1920.

60. S1/210/20, A.C.S. to M.N.A., 19 December 1922, M.N.A., Zomba.

After the 1914-18 War, the government had continued its previous policy of working through the agency of paid chiefs. It soon became apparent, however, that this was proving an inefficient and unsatisfactory system. Chiefs "were in many cases conservative and not so well educated as some of their people,"<sup>61</sup> and they were "not reliable enough and do not possess the necessary influence with their people."<sup>62</sup> As a result, a revised District Administration (Native) Ordinance was enacted in 1924. Principal Headmen remained the executive officers of the colonial administration but it was proposed to create district councils which were to be composed of chiefs and other Africans to advise the Resident. Attempts were now made "to bring into the District Councils a certain number of educated or progressive natives to assist the Headmen." The immediate result, according to a first-grade administrative officer, J.C. Abraham, "has been an increase in the interest taken by various Native Associations." It "is that type of native we are endeavouring to introduce on to the District Council to...enable the more progressive ideas of the educated native to be carried out." Referring perhaps to Levi Mumba, Abrahams declared that "a man of his type can explain to his own people, his own Chief, his

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61. Notes of interviews with Governor Bowring dated 19 March 1928 contained in Minutes of oral evidence taken by the Hilton-Young Commission, F.C.O. Library, London.

62. Governor of Nyasaland in September 1923 cited in Timothy Kiel Barnekov, An Inquiry into the Development of Native Administration in Nyasaland, 1888-1939 (New York, 1967), Syracuse University Program of East African Studies Occasional Paper, No.48, p.56.



own Council, better than we can, with a better prospect of other natives carrying out the Government orders willingly rather than simply because the District Officer tells them to do so."<sup>63</sup>

It is doubtful if the district councils, consisting of a majority of chiefs, proved very attractive to many of the educated elements. Certainly very few of them became members. The councils possessed only advisory functions and had no powers of raising or spending money. What was more, the District Commissioner, who was the chairman, exercised close control and direction over the meetings and the new men, although possessing an opportunity to take part in discussions, must have come to see themselves as a minority in a body of a much more conservative character. Indeed, meetings of district councils appear to have become mainly occasions for the District Commissioner to express his wishes to the chiefs. Writing in 1935, J.C. Abraham, now Senior Provincial Commissioner, concluded that the "former District Councils were unwieldy bodies, regarded by most District Commissioners and almost all natives with little enthusiasm. The District Commissioner did most of the talking and the old men who really mattered slumbered peacefully through the perorations of their more vocal juniors."<sup>64</sup> By 1930, the councils had foundered and where they existed were predominantly chiefly bodies with little commoner participation.

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63. Oral evidence of J.C. Abraham dated 21 March 1928 to the Hilton-Young Commission, F.C.O. Library, London.

64. Nat. 12/3, minute no.54 by Abraham dated 29 July 1935, M.N.A., Zomba.

In the meantime, the associationists, though often regarding chiefs as conservative, attempted to bring them into their own movements as members, sometimes appointing the more important ones as office-bearers and, in one instance, even inserting a clause in the Association's constitution whereby "The President shall be a Principal Headman."<sup>65</sup> Associations also raised matters relating to the improvement of the conditions of chiefs such as asking government to provide them with robes of office,<sup>66</sup> to pay them higher salaries,<sup>67</sup> and to ensure that provisions were made for their comfort when visiting places outside their district.<sup>68</sup> By encouraging mutual co-operation between chiefs and educated elements, Native Association leaders may have hoped to make their political groups more credible and representative in the eyes of the colonial government. What was more, since some of the chiefs had had access to education and had worked as civil servants or clerks in European firms before assuming traditional office, their ideas and views often coincided with those of the associationists. On many of the subjects discussed by the Associations, the traditional authorities were at one with the educated elite, particularly over issues concerned with improved

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65. NS1/3/3, Constitution of the C.D.N.A., article 5 which was approved at a meeting held on 12 November 1929, M.N.A., Zomba.

66. NS1/3/2, Minutes of meeting of the B.N.A. held on 5 February 1927, M.N.A., Zomba.

67. NC1/3/4, Minutes of meetings of W.N.N.A. held between 1-2 May 1929, M.N.A., Zomba.

68. S1/3263/23, Minutes of meeting of N.S.P.N.A. (Mlanje branch) held on 25 September 1927, M.N.A., Zomba.



educational facilities and economic development in the rural areas.<sup>69</sup> But we should not exaggerate the political ties between chiefs and Native Associations. Most of the chiefs had little education, were highly conservative and were closely attached to the tribal ways of life and thought. Few of them could actively participate in meetings transacted in English and most were only interested in tribal matters.

From the late 1920s, during a period when the dogmas of 'indirect rule' were hardening, relations between government and the Native Associations became increasingly strained. The chiefs had hitherto been mainly utilized as executive agents of the colonial administration. Now, however, a growing body of colonial opinion began advocating their use as agencies of local rule to handle the new burdens of socio-economic change that were asserting themselves. The Nyasaland Government, looking for a more satisfactory method of native administration, decided to adopt a form of the system of 'indirect rule' which had been introduced in neighbouring Tanganyika. The system of 'indirect rule' was not officially started in Nyasaland until 1933 but from about 1930 the government had begun insisting that the chiefs were the premier legitimizing force regarding African administration and that the Native Associations could not be considered as alternatives to the chiefly local government hierarchy. At the same time steps were taken in hand not to grant the literate element any legitimacy on its own account; it could only be continued to be recognized if it worked in

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69. See R. Gray, op. cit., pp.172-3.

association with a traditional legitimacy. The Native Associations naturally sought to preserve their independent status as the authentic representatives of African opinion in the Protectorate and thus came into collision with government policy. The nature of this collision and its results for African political activity are now considered in some detail.

With the system of 'indirect rule' being considered for introduction in the imminent future, government officials felt, by 1930, that "if we are to lean in the direction of restoring the prestige and authority of the tribal chiefs, it may be preferable not to give any unnecessary recognition or compliments to Associations composed rather of the other type of 'influential person' - i.e. clerks whose influence is new, rather than chiefs whose influence is 'old'."<sup>70</sup> The outspoken criticisms of the W.N.N.A. during 1929 and 1930 also contributed to the hardening of government's attitude towards the Native Associations. In 1930, the Chief Secretary contended that it was "highly undesirable" that "clamorous educated natives, should in any way displace the District Council, as the vehicle of public opinion in the District," and he urged that their organizations should no longer be encouraged.<sup>71</sup> Addressing the W.N.N.A. in March 1930, the Governor stated that he "wished always to be kept informed

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70. Nat.12/3, C.S. to Governor Thomas, minute dated 10 January 1930, M.N.A., Zomba.

71. See S1/2065/19, secretariat minute Nos.48-51 dated 26 and 30 August and 5 and 11 September 1930, M.N.A., Zomba.



of native opinion but that the opinion he valued most was that expressed by tribal chiefs who in course of time would be given a more responsible share in the governance of the Protectorate....and the need for native associations for the expression of native opinion on public affairs will come to an end."<sup>72</sup> Rather than "try to regulate or suppress them" it was decided to "pour cold water on these Associations."<sup>73</sup> In an attempt to limit their effectiveness, the government now decided to deny them direct access to the centre of its administrative system, i.e. the Governor and the secretariat, and to force them to work through the district councils which were composed almost entirely of chiefs. Notices were dispatched to the various Associations informing them that their minutes and resolutions would henceforward be ignored by the central government unless they were first submitted through and adopted by their respective district councils.<sup>74</sup> In view of the impending introduction of indirect rule and the further consternation aroused in official circles by the R.C.N.P.N.A. and the N.N.N.A.'s protesting of the law penalizing sexual intercourse between a white woman and a black man, the government began enforcing rigorously its new 'tough' policy against the Associations by restricting their direct

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72. ibid., draft comments by P.C.N.P. to W.N.N.A., 6 August 1930.

73. ibid., secretariat minute by C.S. no.50 dated 5 September 1930.

74. ibid., A.C.S. to P.Cs., 17 September 1930.

access to the central secretariat. Resolutions of Native Associations would not even "receive the Governor's consideration, unless they are supported by their respective District Councils,"<sup>75</sup> stated an official directive in 1931.

The severing of direct lines of communication with the central government created deep anxiety among the leaders of the Associations. Not only were they not members of the district councils which, because they were chaired by District Commissioners, might reject the resolutions of Associations, but they also saw the territorial government as the chief focus of their efforts. Worried about the Governor not knowing "all that he should know in regard to his children" they were also fearful of his agents such as District and Provincial Commissioners preventing their minutes, etc., from being forwarded to him or reaching him intact. A statement by the Z.P.N.A., almost certainly written by Levi Mumba, illustrates these and other points of concern, and is sufficiently interesting to bear extensive quotation.

"Most of the matters, if not all, submitted to the government, are those considered of vital importance to natives and which they especially desire His Excellency to know. They therefore submissively request that their minutes should not be mutilated in transmission but submitted in full to His Excellency.

It has always been the aim of the Native Associations to try and place the benefit of their education at the disposal of all their people and for that reason nearly all the

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75. NC1/3/5, A.C.S. to P.Cs., 30 January 1931, M.N.A., Zomba. See also J. van Velsen, op. cit., pp.399-400.



chiefs and headmen are active or passive members of the organization, whereas the District Council is only a council of chiefs with the District Commissioner in which the educated natives as such are not represented.... in view of the District Council being a government establishment even if the Association is represented they think that for a long time that Council will lack initiative and real expressions of views on the part of the natives. The Association naturally is alarmed to hear that their minutes will only be considered if approved and passed by the District Council because they have no proof that the finding of a District Council are free and representative expressions of the views of the natives. The Association is a body of men who are loyal and law abiding as any subject of His Majesty can be and who like others should be accorded the liberty of expression allowed by British justice. They are not chiefly, they do not command nor make any law but merely desire to help themselves and their country by putting before the government suggestions expressed in as free a manner as can never be reached by a District Council. A District Council and an Association are distinct, one conservative and the other progressive but both working for the good of the country and should be fostered as such as is done in other countries. The intention of the Government to suppress the feeling of a section of its children who are looking to her for help to develop and who have done no wrong would be taken as an act of malevolence...." 76

But "individualism (was) the antithesis of indirect rule."<sup>77</sup> Accepting that the Native Associations were entitled to communicate directly with the Governor, and that their minutes and resolutions should be forwarded to the secretariat without mutilation, the government still insisted that minutes, etc., be endorsed by the district council otherwise no undertaking could be given that any

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76. NS1/3/5, Z.P.N.A. to P.C., 13 June 1931. See also Nat. 12/3, R.C.N.P.N.A. to C.S., 26 November 1935 for a similar letter written by Levi Mumba which is quoted in part by J. van Velsen, *op. cit.*, p.405.

77. NS1/3/5, minute by C.S. dated 11 July 1931.

reply beyond a mere acknowledgement would be sent.

"Associations should work with the Councils and not separately from them" summed up the official attitude.<sup>78</sup>

With the coming of indirect rule in 1933, a circular was issued to all Native Associations in the following year outlining procedure for the new situation. District councils had now been abolished and Associations were informed that the government would not be prepared to take any action on their resolutions unless adopted by a Native Authority (who was generally the old Principal Headman) or, in some cases, a council of chiefs. Minutes could, however, be submitted direct to the Governor for his information.<sup>79</sup> But about a year later, in 1935, with a new Governor, Sir Harold Kittermaster, having replaced Sir Hubert Young, doubts began to be expressed by him regarding his predecessor's policy of attempting to "suppress" Native Associations and remove them from the political scene.

In a minute dated May 4, 1935, Kittermaster wrote to the Chief Secretary, "I am not sure whether I agree with the circular issued last year. It is a difficult subject. I should like to see Mumba...."<sup>80</sup> At the subsequent interview, Mumba reiterated the views of the

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78. Nat. 12/3, P.Cs. to Native Associations, 30 July 1931. See also C.S. to R.C.N.P.N.A., 21 March 1934.

79. *ibid.*, C.S. to P.Cs. and all Native Associations enclosing circular entitled "Submission of Matters for the Consideration of Government by Native Associations."

80. *ibid.*, minute no.45. Levi Mumba had discussed the circular of 1934 with the S.P.C. in June 1934.



Associations. The Governor disputed that all Native Authorities were conservative but admitted that "there is some truth in what he says." Of greater interest were the Governor's comments expressing concern that official policy might drive the Associations into political activity of an unconstitutional kind. "It should be" minuted Kittermaster after the interview, "the work of the more educated natives to induce the Native Authority to move forward. In any case it is highly impolitic to act in such a way as to force these associations into an attitude of opposition as has happened in Kenya particularly among the Kikuyu. We should try to use them by encouraging their activity if possible on useful lines." Mumba had claimed that the Native Associations did not get an opportunity to speak at meetings of Native Authorities and Kittermaster therefore thought that it might be "no bad thing if the old District Councils were revived" though not given any statutory form. Associations would be allowed "to nominate representatives to attend these meetings if (the) Native Authority accepted the persons nominated" and all classes of Africans would be provided with a chance to speak.<sup>81</sup>

The "danger" was "the development along divergent lines of two different political organizations."<sup>82</sup> Under the new system of indirect rule the Native Associations

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81. *ibid.*, minute no.47 by Governor Kittermaster to C.S., 12 May 1935.

82. S1/3263/23, minute by J.C. Abraham, S.P.C., dated 15 August 1935, M.N.A., Zomba.

could not be granted any separate recognition as representatives of African opinion. The governmental system had to continue to be founded on the basis of the chiefs. But to obviate against the possibility of an antagonistic educated African elite emerging and to ensure that Native Associations remained overt and constitutional in their approach, the government sought to associate the new men with its local administrative structure. 'Progressive' Africans were now invited to attend and speak at meetings of informal district councils composed of chiefs.<sup>83</sup> This association had to be achieved without in any way undermining the authority of the chiefs. Native Authorities were thus still required to support minutes and resolutions of Native Associations before these could be acted upon by the central government. One important exception was made to this ruling. Perhaps because the R.C.N.P.N.A. functioned "outside of, and far away from the Districts to which its members belong(ed), who consequently have no access to their own Native Authorities"<sup>84</sup> the government proposed not to insist that its minutes, etc., be endorsed by any Native Authority on most matters and agreed to them being sent directly to the central secretariat.<sup>85</sup>

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83. NC1/3/6, circular letter to all D.Cs. dated 23 August 1935, M.N.A., Zomba. For government attempts to promote legitimate political activity in Kenya, see J.M. Lonsdale, "European Attitudes and African Pressures: Missions and Government in Kenya between the Wars," *Race*, 10,2 (1968), pp.143-144.

84. *Nat.* 12/3, minute no.54 by J.C. Abraham, S.P.C., to C.S., 29 July 1935.

85. *ibid.*, C.S. to R.C.N.P.N.A., 20 May 1935.



With the government's insistence that all Native Associations (other than the R.C.N.P.N.A.) should work with and have their minutes confirmed by a Native Authority, many of them soon began to lose their momentum. Those operating in the northern and central regions, where a number of important paramount chieftaincies existed, either disappeared or survived, but with little political energy, or merged with local tribal councils. In Mzimba and Ncheu, the M.N.A. and the N.N.A. were fused with their respective Ngoni councils. In Tongaland, the W.N.N.A. became moribund or at least inactive after the creation of the Tonga Tribal Council, being also riven by internal conflicts.<sup>86</sup> Occasional meetings were held by the M.N.A. and the N.N.N.A. but they showed little vigour and seem to have left the R.C.N.P.N.A. in Zomba to act for them. Conditions were different in the southern region. Not only were there no recognized paramount chiefs to form district-wide councils as in Mzimba and Ncheu but many of the chiefs were weak and possessed little authority. Moreover, a number of Native Authorities were to be found in all of the southern districts, and in the absence of district councils of chiefs, as in Tongaland, the government agreed to consider Association minutes provided they were countersigned by any one Native Authority. This seems

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86. NC1/3/6, contains reports by D.Cs. on the effects of indirect rule and government policy on Native Associations. See also S.P.C. to the Superintendent of Police, 21 November 1939. For the W.N.N.A., see J. van Velsen, "The Establishment of the Administration in Tongaland," in Historians in Tropical Africa (Salisbury, 1962), p.188.

to have been easily achieved and the Associations therefore remained politically active with the exception of the C.D.N.A. which appears to have collapsed after troubles in 1934 over the abscondence of funds.<sup>87</sup>

It was therefore in the south that the Native Associations remained politically active and it was here that the Nyasaland African Congress was to be founded. It was in the towns of Blantyre, Limbe and Zomba that the main influences which directed educated Africans to form a united front were inspired. Although the groundwork for the formation of Congress had been laid throughout the country, the final stages in its evolution were to be completed in the administrative and commercial centres of Nyasaland.

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87. S1/3263/23, B.N.A. to C.S., 14 June 1935 and C.S. to B.N.A., 10 September 1935, M.N.A., Zomba.



## CHAPTER SIX

### The Move to the Politics of Representation and Union.

#### Colonial change and local administration

Under the Native Authority Ordinance and Native Courts Ordinance of 1933, powers were conferred on the Native Authorities, who were generally the old Principal Headmen, to enact rules providing for the "peace, good order and welfare" of their areas; to raise revenue and expend such monies on specific local services; and to establish Native Courts with extensive powers of civil and criminal jurisdiction. Basic socio-economic change had necessitated modification in the previous system of local administration whereby chiefs had been organized to deal mainly with problems of law and order. New problems had begun to confront local administration by the late 1920s which required that chiefs be able to perform a wider set of functions. It was hoped that under the new 1933 ordinances the chiefs would be able to handle such problems as those of sanitation, water supply and general social welfare and thereby acquire greater status in local affairs.

Native Authorities did not have any formally constituted councils but had councillors who were generally local headmen or court assessors on whose advice or support they were in varying degrees dependent. Among the two main Ngoni groups, however, administrative bodies were established on a district level. In both of these

groups, the Ngoni paramounts were recognized with subordinate Native Authorities under them. They were the only indigenous rulers in Nyasaland to have subordinate Native Authorities under them. A biannual tribal indaba was organized in the Mombera district. Called the Mbelwa Jere Administrative meeting, it was attended by the paramount chief, his traditional advisers, the subordinate Native Authorities and large numbers of commoners including the educated elements. It dealt with a variety of subjects of mainly local interest. There was no similar formally constituted council among the southern Ngoni. Instead, a conference known as the Ngoni Highlands Association met annually at the grave of paramount chief Gomani's father who had been executed by the British in 1896. It too was a forum at which the people could express their views on matters concerning the Ncheu district generally. Both of these district-wide meetings discussed a wide range of local problems and petitioned the government for improvements and developments along similar lines to the previous Native Associations which had now become merged with the local authorities. Both councils continued the demand for better educational facilities and criticized the poor conditions of service for African teachers and the small governmental expenditure on education. Because the two paramount chiefs were mission-educated and because they utilized the skills and knowledge of the educated elements in their councils, the policies of the two Ngoni administrative



bodies echoed those of the new men in the Native Associations. Educated Africans also seem to have advised the chiefs of the lakeside Tonga who established the Tonga Tribal Council. Here, too, many local subjects were debated and resolutions followed the modernizing lines of the now moribund West Nyasa Native Association.

No similar district-wide councils were formed elsewhere in the Protectorate until after the second world war. Without doubt, however, many Native Authorities must have asked educated men to serve as their advisers or councillors. But the role that enterprising Africans such as teachers, evangelists and traders could play in local affairs was very limited. Even the Native Authority systems, as agencies of local development, possessed little power and influence. The system of 'indirect rule' adopted in Nyasaland in 1933 was much weaker than that introduced in neighbouring countries. Native Authorities were not empowered to collect taxes and to administer government revenue as was the case in Tanganyika. Any expenditure that they were to control was to be met primarily from local rates, dues or fees which could only be levied with government approval. Their capacity to finance and undertake modern social services for the local populace was consequently severely undermined, and most of them only had sufficient funds to pay for their own small salaries and for the staff to administer their areas. Moreover, Native Authorities were only part of the machinery of local government; central government departments remained responsible for the initiating of develop-

ment policies and programmes.<sup>1</sup> The result was that the European district officers tended to use the chiefs as little more than their agents and they were also the source of most of the orders and rules that were passed. Native Authority staff was given little pay and less training and the efficiency of the Native Authorities, who were also not provided with an adequate salary for the maintenance of their position, varied with the qualities of the individuals concerned.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it was becoming obvious that the major problems facing Africans were not local but national and the Native Authorities were impotent over such issues.

For this was the time when metropolitan thinking on colonial administration generally had begun to advocate that the central government take greater action in all fields of economic and social development. From the early 1930s, there was increasing central government interference in local affairs, primarily to expand agricultural production and improve welfare services. There were, for instance, a growing number of marketing controls and the first tentative attempts to change traditional

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1. Timothy Kiel Barnekov, An Inquiry into the Development of Native Administration in Nyasaland, 1888-1939 (New York, 1967), pp.71-5, 85. See also Lord Hailey, Native Administration in the British African Territories (5 parts. London, 1950), 2, pp.22, 27-59. Until 1949 the Native Authorities did not levy a local rate and then it was fixed at only 1s. per taxpayer.
  2. R.S. Hudson, Report on Development of Local Government in Nyasaland (Colonial Office, London, 1951), p.2. See also T.D. Thomson, Domasi Community Development Scheme 1949-1954 (Zomba, 1955), pp.23-4.



African methods of land usage. One result of this new policy was that the departmental experts became more important than the Native Authorities as regards the new modernization programmes. It was they who now began to deal with all aspects of the initiation and implementation of policies thus reversing any ideas that may have been entertained of the chiefs playing any important role in a decentralized scheme of government. The problems were considered to be far too technical and, as we shall see in the next chapter, especially in the case of soil erosion, much too urgent to allow local preferences to interfere with the central planning of the government departments. As more and more Africans came into increasing contact with the machinery of central government, they began to find that the solutions of traditional life were inadequate and inapplicable. The chiefs were in no position to perform any purposive roles in the fields of economic and social development; they were merely governmental agents. The colonial government had moved from district administration to the concept of territorial government. The remaining African political organizations were to follow suit by seeking direct African representation on such institutions as the Legislative Council and all other boards directly affecting the lives of the indigenous population. The political impotence of the local chiefly councils; the dissatisfaction that must have existed among progressive Africans from their failure to be admitted, in any significant way, to the exercise of power in local affairs;

and the increasing intervention of the central government in rural development, all contributed to African political demands focussing on representation in the key decision-making institution in the central political system, i.e. the Legislative Council.

#### Closer union and political representation

In the meantime, Native Associations in the southern region were still continuing their activities. Indeed, some of them were becoming more active and perhaps more trenchant in their criticisms of the colonial situation, especially as a younger generation of educated Africans assumed their leadership. The two major Associations were the R.C.N.P.N.A. and the B.N.A., with the Z.P.N.A. showing some activity on occasions. All the other previous Associations at Mlanje, Port Herald and Chiradzulu were now moribund though some of them continued to hold a few irregular meetings into the early 1940s. Some of them would also send delegates to Blantyre to participate in discussions of important topics. One example of this occurred in July 1935 when the B.N.A. organized a meeting to discuss the question of 'closer union' with the two Rhodesias which had been mooted by a recent meeting of Europeans in the region. Representatives from a number of southern district Associations attended and were joined by some Native Authorities and headmen. Together they drafted a petition to the Colonial Office in which they expressed their absolute opposition to any 'closer association' or full amalgamation of Nyasaland



with Southern Rhodesia.<sup>3</sup>

The B.N.A. became during the 1930s the major forum for the expression of views of southern Africans. A 'second-generation' of mission adherents, most of whom had been born during the early years of the century, gradually entered into the leadership positions of the Association and turned it into a more vigorous body. Certainly the tenor of some of its minutes became more critical of government failures in the fields of economic and educational development. Attempts were made to bring the local Native Authorities and headmen into its deliberations and a revised set of rules was adopted in 1936 one of which stated that the object was to "assist Native Authorities by advising them in the management of local government and in the administration of native law and customs and in the preservation of native rights."<sup>4</sup> Efforts were also made to develop links with African spokesmen in the other southern districts and B.N.A. minutes were dispatched to them for comment and consideration. All this was reflected in the growing number of issues of general interest that the Association debated such as those relating to cotton and tobacco growing, passes for Africans and the recruitment of labour for employment abroad. On some of these and other subjects, ideas were exchanged with Africans in neighbouring

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3. NS2/1/5, Annual report of the P.C.S.P. for the year 1935, M.N.A., Zomba.

4. S1/3263/23, Revised rules of the B.N.A. dated 3 October 1936, M.N.A., Zomba.

districts and occasionally joint meetings were held to present a united demand to government. The case of 'closer union' has already been cited. Another instance occurred in September 1937 when delegates from the M.J.N.A. attended a B.N.A. meeting at which it was decided to petition the government to set up a High School in Nyasaland.<sup>5</sup> Thus even if the B.N.A. remained mainly the forum of expression for locally-based Africans, it was beginning to bring to its deliberations the views of people in some of the surrounding districts; and through its widening contacts it was coming to constitute the instrument for co-ordinating the views of many Africans in the southern region.

As we have seen, the introduction of 'indirect rule' in 1933 led to the decline in the importance of the northern Native Associations. All of them further suffered from the discontinuity of membership due to emigration and the transfer of African clerks. Moreover, many of the major African political leaders who remained now came to be fully engaged in building up the new African churches in the region while others participated in the councils of the local Native Authorities. The M.N.A. and the N.N.N.A. continued, however, to hold meetings, generally once a year, to discuss matters which were mainly suggested to them for consideration by the R.C.N.P.N.A. But they were not very active and seem to have left the Representative Committee in Zomba to expound

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5. ibid., Minutes of meeting of B.N.A. held on 25 September 1937.



their points of view. The archives reflect nothing more about these two bodies after 1936 and it may be that they both came to an end around that time. As for the W.N.N.A., displaced by the Tonga Tribal Council and also torn by personal rivalries, it had become defunct around 1933. In 1938, an attempt was made to reactivate it and a new constitution was drafted. Y.Z. Mwase and E.K. Kamwana were invited to join but declined to do so and the organization does not appear to have proceeded any further.<sup>6</sup> It was therefore left to the R.C.N.P.N.A. not only to centralize but give continuity to the activities of the northern Native Associations.

Under the chairmanship of Levi Mumba till 1936 and I.M. Jere to 1941, the small group of northerners constituting the Representative Committee were the most energetic Africans engaged in politics in the Protectorate. Regular monthly meetings were held and numerous representations made to government on a wide range of subjects of interest to Africans throughout Nyasaland. Detailed memoranda were submitted to commissions such as the Committee of Enquiry on Emigrant Labour and to the Finance Commissioner, Sir Robert Bell. Both of these documents spelt out plainly the inadequacies of the government's economic policy, detailed ways of promoting economic and social development, and urged the colonial authorities to ensure that the lot of migrant workers was improved.<sup>7</sup>

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6. NC1/3/6, Minutes of meeting of W.N.N.A. held on 19 February 1938, M.N.A., Zomba.

7. R.C.N.P.N.A. to Committee of Enquiry on Emigrant Labour, 22 July 1935, and R.C.N.P.N.A. to Financial Commissioner, 15 October, 1937, in I.M. Jere papers.

Close contacts were also maintained with the B.N.A. and the Z.P.N.A. and all three bodies exchanged minutes and resolutions as well as ideas and information. But even though Mumba continually voiced the demand for closer co-operation and unity, the shift to a united movement of Native Associations was not immediately forthcoming. On the occasion of his giving up the chairmanship of the R.C.N.P.N.A. as he was being transferred to Blantyre and then to Lilongwe, Mumba declared that "it is our fervent hope that future years may see the birth of an amalgamated Nyasaland African Political Congress".<sup>8</sup> In 1936, however, there was little determination to follow up this bold idea. What was needed was a cause big enough to bring the Associations together into a concerted movement. In the late 1930s, the question of 'closer union' was to draw the educated Africans together.

Throughout the inter-war period, the European community in Nyasaland was extremely small. In the late 1930s it numbered about 1750, of which about 300 were engaged in planting and around 250 in commerce and industry. Moreover, from the mid-1920s, with the collapse of a number of white planters and the gradual expansion in African peasant production, there could have been few doubts that Europeans would always remain a very small minority in the country. The Protectorate's broken and

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8. Bantu Mirror (Bulawayo), 8 August 1936, p.1 in I.M. Jere papers. See also Nat.12/3, for a letter by Mumba read at the general meeting of the Z.P.N.A. on 24 July 1937 in which he suggested the possible union of Native Associations within the next few years, M.N.A., Zomba.



uncompleted line of communications, its limited areas of healthy uplands, and its lack of mineral wealth, ensured that there was little possibility of any extensive white settlement in Nyasaland. Throughout the 1920s, the settler-owned Nyasaland Times continuously emphasized the fact that Nyasaland could never become a white man's country.<sup>9</sup> According to Professor R.C. Pratt, a similar situation of small numbers of Europeans in Uganda had led to the white community there never developing strong political ambitions as a racial minority. Similarly, during the 1920s, Europeans in Nyasaland "ignored the two main preoccupations of a self-conscious and politically ambitious racial minority - increased immigration and increased political representation."<sup>10</sup> When they did act politically, and this applied only to the non-evangelical and non-governmental sections of the community, it was generally to promote their several economic interests rather than to enhance their collective influence as a racial minority.

This was demonstrated very clearly in the reactions of the various Nyasaland settler organizations to the proposals for 'closer union' which were widely canvassed in the 1920s. Many Europeans in neighbouring territories, particularly Kenya, were becoming convinced that the best

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9. See, for example, editorials in the following issues of the Nyasaland Times, 4 May 1916, p.1; 9 March 1922, pp.2-3; 13 and 16 September 1927, p.2.

10. R.C. Pratt, "Administration and Politics in Uganda 1919-1945," in Vincent Harlow and E.M. Chilver assisted by Alison Smith, eds., History of East Africa, Vol.2 (Oxford, 1965), p.511.

hope for their future lay in creating a larger territorial unit. Such unions of British territories in East and Central Africa were expected to increase both the economic and political influence of Europeans.<sup>11</sup> Whites in Nyasaland, however, were not particularly enthusiastic about a Central African union which, they feared, would be dominated by Europeans in Southern Rhodesia for their own ends. For a number of years, they had advocated some form of merger with Northern Rhodesia, especially with its eastern province,<sup>12</sup> but were uncertain about any alignment with Southern Rhodesia. As for union with the three East African territories, this appears to have attracted little or no comment, perhaps because it was never a feasible proposition. The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce of Nyasaland, which represented the trading interests and larger agricultural companies, believed that the "ultimate federation of the British Territories in Tropical East and Central Africa" was "a desirable object." But it felt that Nyasaland was not yet ready to join in any such federation until its communications had been improved and the economy greatly expanded. As a first step, however, it was desirable to "re-unite Nyasaland and North Eastern Rhodesia." In its memorandum to the 1928 Hilton Young Commission, which was examining the

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11. For a survey of these proposals between the wars, see Robert I. Rotberg, "The Federation Movement in British East and Central Africa, 1889-1953," Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, 2 (1964), pp.141-154.

12. C.O.525/69, Smith to C.O., 11 December 1916, enclosure Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce to C.S., 2 December 1916, P.R.O., London; The Nyasaland Times, 7 September 1916, p.1; S1/1455/27, Nyasaland Chamber to A.C.S., 7 October 1927, M.N.A., Zomba.



problem of 'closer union', the Chamber declared that it was "strongly of opinion" that union with the two Rhodesias alone "would be against the best interests of the Protectorate, chiefly because the policy of Southern Rhodesia and of the Railway corridor of Northern Rhodesia is similar to that of South Africa, and is unsuited to a Protectorate such as Nyasaland." The "development of Nyasaland hitherto" it continued, "has been on the Dual Policy with equal rights for all races, without distinction of creed or colour, and it is believed that this policy is the most suitable and the only just one for tropical territories with large and progressive native populations, and where so much of the country is unsuited to colonization by European races." It also apprehended that any amalgamation with the Rhodesias "would simply mean that Nyasaland would become a recruiting ground." Finally, it opposed the delegation of any of the powers of the imperial government to a settler-dominated Assembly as had been advocated by Europeans in Kenya. The Chamber concluded that it was "impossible for the Colonial Office to divest itself in any manner in favour of a local European population of its declared trust on behalf of the natives of these territories, and that meantime, any suggestion of an elected local European majority or any local or federal legislature is inconsistent with such trust."<sup>13</sup>

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13. Undated memorandum submitted by the Nyasaland Chamber to the Hilton-Young Commission, in Memoranda and other papers circulated to the commission, Vol.4, F.C.O., Library, London.

If this was the voice of the larger European economic interests in Nyasaland, then the smaller farmers and planters organizations were also uncertain about any merger with Southern Rhodesia, being particularly concerned that the Protectorate would become a reservoir of labour for richer neighbours. The Cholo Planters Association, for example, believed that the interests of Nyasaland were more closely allied with the Rhodesias than with East Africa but did not advocate any immediate union with them until safeguards had been established against the recruitment of Nyasa labour for outside employment. The Nyasaland Planters' Association and the South Nyasa Planters' Association joined the Cholo body in favouring amalgamation with North-Eastern Rhodesia but were opposed to any merger with Southern Rhodesia.<sup>14</sup>

The Hilton-Young Commission was itself divided over the future of the protectorates of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Eventually, after lengthy consideration of its report, the British Government decided to rule out amalgamation for the time being and little was heard of the matter for a few years. By the early 1930s, however, there was, in the words of the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, "a considerable change of opinion" among local European settlers. Support for the idea of closer union with the Rhodesias now came to be

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14. ibid., Memoranda submitted by the Cholo Planters Association dated 14 March 1928 and undated memoranda by the Nyasaland Planters' Association and the South Nyasa Planters' Association to the Hilton-Young Commission.



increasingly voiced by the Chamber,<sup>15</sup> by the recently-formed Convention of Associations, which represented unofficial European opinion in the Protectorate,<sup>16</sup> and by the settler-owned Nyasaland Times.<sup>17</sup> The serious economic depression at the time was a key factor accounting for this new attitude. It was widely believed among the European unofficial community that closer union of Central Africa would lead to administrative economy, reduce taxation and promote greater economic co-operation so vital to forward the prosperity of Nyasaland. In the Legislative Council unofficials levelled charges of extravagance and inefficiency at the government and condemned it for maintaining the country in a state of economic stagnation. Closer association with the Rhodesias was thus now advocated as the only means of promoting the economic and social development of a small and remote agricultural territory which had for years been neglected by a parsimonious imperial government.

Allied to these economic factors were racial and political reasons for favouring amalgamation with the Rhodesias. Unlike the Europeans in Uganda, those in Nyasaland were not unimportant as primary producers of wealth. Moreover, those planters who had survived the economic difficulties of the late 1920s and early 1930s had become

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15. See Nyasaland Times, 16 December 1930, p.2 for resolutions passed at meeting of 9 December 1930.

16. ibid., 10 December 1931, p.4.

17. ibid., 12 April 1929, p.2; 24 October 1930, p.2; 13 February 1931, p.2; and 2 December 1932, p.2.

rooted in the country and thought of themselves as permanent settlers. But in an overwhelming black country, they entertained a basic insecurity and fear of what would happen in the future. Increasingly, they had grown concerned about the 'West African' policy of the Nyasaland Government which, they believed, ignored the interests of Europeans.<sup>18</sup> Amalgamation with a country like Southern Rhodesia was thus seen as a way of establishing in Nyasaland a regime of prosperity and security for themselves and their children.

They formed in 1935 a Greater Rhodesia League in Nyasaland<sup>19</sup> and though their ultimate political objectives were conveniently vague they spoke enthusiastically of responsible government and a British Central African Dominion.<sup>20</sup> The Nyasaland Times argued that the fact that the Europeans were so overwhelmingly outnumbered by Africans in Nyasaland made a Greater Rhodesia that much more desirable. With some form of closer association "this disproportion would disappear for the stubborn policy of opposition to white settlement would be replaced by European development schemes."<sup>21</sup> W. Tait Bowie (later Sir William), a leading settler and unofficial member of the Legislative Council, posed the question for

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18. ibid., 5 February 1932, p.4 for minutes of meeting of Cholo Planters' Association. See also issue of 2 February 1932, p.4 where the Cholo Planters' Association resolved to call itself the Cholo Settlers' Association to emphasize that Europeans had come to settle permanently "in this country of our domicile."

19. ibid., 24 June 1935, pp.1-2, 5-6.

20. ibid., 2 December 1932, p.2 and 30 November 1934, p.2.

21. ibid., 20 June 1935, p.4 and see also 19 August 1935, p.4.



whites in Nyasaland as follows: "Do we consider the ideal is one strong British self-governing community in Central Africa, or do we wish to remain for ever the vassals of the Colonial Office?"<sup>22</sup>

Recognition of the fact that they were too few in number to secure independence from the Colonial Office had now led many white settlers in Nyasaland to seek protection of their interests in a united European dominion in Central Africa. Simultaneously, the 1930s saw Europeans seeking to improve their position within the Protectorate itself. Nyasaland was not to be a planter's country but Europeans still had an important economic role to play in its development. Their production of tobacco and tea greatly supplemented African production which could not alone support the Protectorate unless communications were expanded considerably. Tea was becoming a major export crop and the government sought to assist white estate-owners to bolster its production. Capital development was also dependent upon Europeans and the colonial government, extremely anxious about economic development, began again, during the 1930s, to favour white interests as far as possible. In response to European pressures, settler strength in the Legislative Council was increased and increasingly Europeans participated on various boards and committees that were recommending policy over a wide range of social and economic subjects, including land, labour, transport and agriculture. There was no talk among

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22. ibid., 30 May 1938, p.5.

European settlers of achieving self-government but they clearly sought greater control over the machinery of government. Amalgamation, however, would secure more effectively their key political interests.

So intent were the supporters of amalgamation on "breaking away from the 'dead hand' of the Colonial Office" that the Nyasaland Times argued that no "close analysis of the 'advantages' has ever been made." With the advent in 1938 of a Royal Commission to examine the possibility of closer union in Central Africa, the settler organ claimed that few of the advantages which had generally been propounded could in fact be "sustained" under closer investigation.<sup>23</sup> The Convention of Associations also recognized that closer union would not immediately solve all the problems of local European settlers, particularly those of an economic nature. Settlers voiced fears that the dominant group in a united Central Africa would be the larger Southern Rhodesian white community whose economic interests conflicted with those of planters in Nyasaland. Further fears focussed on white farmers to the south monopolizing cheap Nyasaland labour for their own interests.<sup>24</sup> Any sense of a common political and racial cause uniting whites throughout Central Africa was overridden by the fact that the economic

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23. ibid., 2 June 1938, p.4.

24. Ibid., 9 May 1938, pp.5-6 for memorandum on closer co-operation prepared by a special sub-committee of the Convention of Associations. See also the issue of 30 May 1938, pp.5,8, for report of proceedings of the Convention's general meeting.



interests of European planters and traders in Nyasaland would suffer under such a larger union. In the end, the settlers' memorandum to the Bledisloe Commission only proposed "ultimate amalgamation." But in line with their attempts to obtain greater participation in Nyasaland's decision-making process, they asked that "provision should be made for the creation of an unofficial majority (in the Legislative Council) in all matters not directly relating to native affairs."<sup>25</sup>

African evidence to the 1928 Hilton-Young Commission was vague and probably ill-considered, especially those aspects of it which pertained to the question of closer union. Closer union during the 1920s had not yet become an explosive issue in the Protectorate and the Native Associations seem to have hardly debated the subject. Only the two Associations based in Zomba, the R.C.N.P.N.A. and the Z.P.N.A., appear to have submitted memoranda to the Commission and these seem to have been drafted by Levi Mumba. Indeed, federation was given some support although only so far as it enabled Nyasaland workers to continue finding employment in surrounding territories.<sup>26</sup> In view of the subsequent overwhelming African opposition to amalgamation this support is rather surprising. It may well be that Mumba and his colleagues

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25. ibid., 27 June 1938, pp.5,6, for Convention memorandum to the Bledisloe Commission. See also issue of 30 June 1938, pp.5-6 for record of Convention oral evidence before Commission.

26. Minutes of meeting of the Z.P.N.A. held on 18 February 1928 submitted to the Hilton-Young Commission in Memoranda and other papers, op. cit., Vol.4.

saw the closer union proposals of the 1920s as encompassing not solely the two Rhodesias but the three East African territories as well. The pro-native policies pursued in Tanganyika and Uganda may therefore not have created any alarm as an exclusive union with the Rhodesias would have probably done. The distinction was not made clear in the African memoranda but, nonetheless, a warning was sounded. "When federation comes and a federal council is established we hope that precautions will be taken so that our interests will not be undermined and that the common authority so constituted will not flood Nyasaland with vexatious and unnecessary laws and with the surplus populations of other countries."<sup>27</sup>

By the mid-1930s the situation had changed immensely. Africans had become increasingly concerned and suspicious of the persistent white demands for a Central African union. No longer were any suggestions being made for Nyasaland to merge with the territories of East Africa; closer association only with the Rhodesias was being advocated. African reaction to such a scheme was predictable. On no account were they prepared to see their country joined with Southern Rhodesia. Africans in Nyasaland knew Southern Rhodesia well because they went there in their thousands to work and they were adamant in their opposition to union with a country which they knew was being run for the benefit of Europeans. In Nyasaland, under the Colonial Office, they knew that the country was

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27. ibid., undated memorandum submitted by the R.C.N.P.N.A.



ultimately theirs and was being primarily run for their benefit, even though they did not always agree with the policies and methods adopted by the colonial government. The advent of the Bledisloe Commission, therefore, called forth the clearest manifestation of African unity and revealed a growing national unity as educated elements, traditional authorities and the ordinary people in the rural areas were brought together to defend their status as a protected people who should be allowed to develop on their own and not in conjunction with a white settler-dominated state. Meetings were held at Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe, attended by large numbers from all over the Protectorate, at which memoranda were approved for submission to the Royal Commission. All of these memoranda detailed reasons why amalgamation with Southern Rhodesia was not wanted as, in the words of the Blantyre document, "what is going on in that territory as far as Africans are concerned is a mild form of slavery."<sup>28</sup>

When the Bledisloe Commission published its report in 1939, it accepted the idea of eventual closer association in principle but discounted that immediate steps be taken to achieve it. All three Central African territories, it considered, would in time become increasingly interdependent but for the present no formal link should be established between them. The differences between the native policies followed north and south of

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28. See COM.3/1, M.N.A., Zomba for African memoranda submitted to the Bledisloe Commission, particularly those by the R.C.N.P.N.A. (dated 31 May 1938) and the B.N.A. (17 May 1938).

the Zambezi obviated against immediate amalgamation. Overwhelming African opposition was also of crucial importance. The passionately expressed opposition and aversion of northern Africans to any association with Southern Rhodesia so impressed the Commission that it declared:

"If so large a proportion of the population of the combined Territory were brought unwillingly under a unified Government, it would prejudice the prospect of cooperation in ordered development under such a Government." 29

Such a conclusion might well have been remembered fifteen years later.

But if the issue of 'closer union' had called forth a feeling of African national unity it did not lead in 1938 to the creation of a national-wide political organization. It is just possible that such a movement may have been formed quite soon had other events not intervened. For there was a growing feeling that such a territorial and united African organization offered a more promising way for solving the problems of African subordination and poverty. The stimulus for African cooperation provided by the European demands for amalgamation had led to fundamental results in that African unity had clearly influenced the outcome of the 'closer union' issue. The outbreak of the second world war was perhaps the most important factor which postponed the formation of a national African political body. Another was the serious split which arose in the B.N.A. and which

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29. Rhodesia-Nyasaland Royal Commission Report, Cmd. 5949 (1939), p.218.



diverted the attentions of southern region Africans to local associational concerns.

Africans were increasingly beginning to recognize the new significant role of the Legislative Council in the Protectorate's decision-making process. From the early 1930s, with the government taking greater action in all fields of economic and social development, the legislature had become a decisive political instrument in Nyasaland, being involved in the enactment of a growing number of laws affecting the lives of Africans. It was therefore not surprising that Africans soon sought to obtain an indigenous and more effective voice on the Legislative Council than that provided by the missionary representative and government officials. At the same time, the ineffectiveness of the Native Associations to influence the central secretariat and the inability of the Native Authorities to exercise much influence on the expanding central government interference in local affairs, was leading Africans to search for new techniques for the solution of their problems. As suggested already, one way was to create, in the words of Levi Mumba, "a united front of all African opinion in a Congress." Such an African movement operating on a territorial level would not, like the district-based Native Associations, have to work through the Native Authorities and would seek to influence the Legislative Council and all other bodies directly affecting the lives of Africans. Linked to this was the idea of direct African representation on the Legislative Council. "Politically," wrote Mumba to Dr.

H.K. Banda in Edinburgh in 1939, "Africans are more and more clamouring to be heard, not being content to be represented by other races."<sup>30</sup> If Mumba does not seem to have expressed the need to have Africans in the central legislature or to have gone beyond stressing the importance of establishing a "Congress" which would represent African opinion to the colonial government, others, particularly in the B.N.A., were beginning to demand direct African representation in the Legislative Council.

It appears that there was to be a final general meeting of the B.N.A. to approve the memorandum to be submitted to the Bledisloe Commission and it was hoped, by a number of members, that this would incorporate a demand for African political representation. This new demand may have been partly stimulated by the European memorandum to the Commission which asked for an unofficial white majority in the legislature in all matters relating to non-African affairs. But of greater importance in determining this request was probably the fact that the lives of Africans were increasingly being affected by decisions made in the Legislative Council and it was therefore imperative that their interests should be adequately represented on it. This, it was believed, could only be accomplished by Africans themselves. It was felt that legislation affecting African well-being was often slanted in favour of the white community and Africans consequently wanted to look after their own interests.

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30. L.Z. Mumba to H.K. Banda, 15 February 1939, in I.M. Jere papers.



All this was brought out in the 'minority' memorandum which some members of the B.N.A. sent to the Commission.

"We are troubled because...our small European community has more power with the Government than all of us Africans together. We see that even with a majority of official members of the Legislative Council the unofficial members are allowed to arrange things in the interest of the Europeans, and that native development is hindered unless it is also for the benefit of Europeans."

The 'minority' memorandum then proceeded to give an example "of our trouble."

"Many of our people grow tobacco. The Native Tobacco Board regulates this industry. But it is not native. We have no say in the election of its members, and on the Board are those who buy our tobacco. Also it is now law that all our tobacco must be sold on the auction floors of a private company. We were not consulted or we should have asked that the Government should take the control of that company in our interests. Such questions are decided in the Legislative Council." 31

Allegedly for reasons of time, the B.N.A. memorandum prepared by the President, K. Ellerton Mposa, and some of his colleagues on the executive committee was not discussed by the whole Association at a general meeting before being presented for consideration to the Bledisloe Commission. A large number of members, led by the Rev. Thomas Masseah, thereupon decided to draft another memorandum which would be more representative of the views of the B.N.A. It was this second memorial which contained a demand for greater African participation in all bodies which directly concerned African affairs such as the Native Tobacco Board. It also asked the Commission "to

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31. Memorandum cited in full in the Nyasaland Times, 30 June 1938, pp.2-3.

consider whether the time has not come when educated Africans should be allowed to elect half the members of the Legislative Council so that our interests will be properly looked after and advanced. We do not ask that members be Africans, but only that we should be allowed to choose those we know and trust to represent us."<sup>32</sup> The Nyasaland Government may not have viewed the 'minority' memorandum with much enthusiasm and it may well have attempted to ensure that the more radical members of the B.N.A. did not get an opportunity to represent their views to the Commission. Mposa was selected by the Senior Provincial Commissioner to lead a delegation of southern region associationists to meet the commissioners and he was to be the major African spokesmen. Mposa was the head clerk of the S.P.C. and it is possible that the government hoped he would have a moderating influence on the delegation and would forestall precipitous demands.

In the words of one of the two hundred Africans who listened to the open interview between the Commission and the African delegation, Mposa "was totally senseless." In a letter to Levi Mumba, who was then working in Lilongwe where he was making preparations for Africans of the northern region to meet the Commission there, the writer claimed that "Nobody else other than Mposa could speak" at the Blantyre interview. When asked whether Africans desired representation on the Legislative Council, "(I) very much regret to inform you that the man (Mposa) said

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32. ibid., The present discussion is also based on interviews with Messrs. K.E. Mposa and J.F. Sangala in Blantyre, Malawi.



'No we want a European as usual.'" Mposa even declared that he could not recommend one qualified African who would be able to understand and contribute to the work of the legislature. The writer pleaded with Mumba to get one of the delegates at the Lilongwe meeting to raise the question of direct African political representation. Mposa had absolutely failed to do this. The "P.C. might have buttered Mposa in all ways, in the face that his services since the natives would have their own representatives in the Legislative Council his services might be of no value or not required."<sup>33</sup> This latter suspicion is difficult to verify but it is worth noting that during the interview the chairman of the Commission asked the Senior Provincial Commissioner to withdraw as his presence might deter Africans from speaking their minds freely.<sup>34</sup> The chairman seems to have been well aware of the differences within the B.N.A. and suggested that "you have in the Association what might be described as a right and left wing." As a result, the Rev. T. Masseah was questioned briefly about his memorandum and in his evidence he claimed that the government was "too largely influenced by the small European community of the country" when African interests were concerned. During the interview, Masseah made an unequivocal demand for "direct representation" by Africans

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33. Letter by unknown African to L.Z. Mumba, 27 June 1938, in I.M. Jere papers. This report of Mposa's attitude and behaviour is confirmed by the record of oral evidence heard by the Royal Commission at Blantyre on 24 June 1938, Vol.3 in F.C.O. Library, London.

34. Oral evidence to Royal Commission, Vol.3, op. cit.,

themselves.<sup>35</sup>

The development of the Masseah/Mposa factions within the B.N.A. led to serious differences in the Association which diverted the energies of the Blantyre intelligentsia which might otherwise have gone into the building up of a national-wide political movement in concert with other Native Associations. Throughout 1938 and 1939, the Blantyre associationists remained embroiled in local associational matters. Nevertheless, the Masseah faction, which now led the Association, continued to voice its demands for African political representation and was supported by the R.C.N.P.N.A. in Zomba. Several chiefs also appear to have joined the educated elements in expressing a desire for some regular means by which Africans could make their views known before legislation was passed which affected them.<sup>36</sup> The Nyasaland Government refused to grant Africans direct representation in the Legislative Council. Instead, reported Lord Hailey, the government "has adopted the procedure of consulting Native Authorities in certain cases about bills which are to be considered in the Council." While Hailey thought that this was "of value in itself" it was liable "to provoke some irritation on other occasions when laws are

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35. ibid., See also Nyasaland Times, 30 June 1938, pp.2-3 for evidence.

36. Nat.12/39, C.O. to Mackenzie-Kennedy, 15 October 1941, enclosure confidential report by Lord Hailey entitled Native Administration and Political Development (1940-42), section 16 of Chap.8, M.N.A., Zomba. A copy of this report can also be found in the F.C.O. Library, London.



passed (as sometimes they must be) without consulting the Native Authorities, or some body on which their views are represented." He made no recommendations regarding African representation on the Legislative Council but noted simply that the "official view appears to incline to the institution in the first instance of provincial councils."<sup>37</sup>

To accommodate the new political demands of Africans, the government was thus seeking to widen the scale of African politics from the district to the provincial level. But Africans, in demanding direct political representation at the centre, had already moved to political agitation on a national level. Indeed, the Native Associations had from their inception seen the territorial government as the chief focus of their efforts. They had for years attempted to influence the officials at the central secretariat and also induce them to refer bills on African matters to the Associations for comment and consideration. But such an approach had achieved no substantive reforms. Now, however, with Europeans demanding increased political representation and central government legislation increasingly regulating local African affairs more closely, the remaining Native Associations had recognized the need for direct African participation in the central legislature. At the same time, a movement was afoot to draw Africans together into a national-wide political movement.

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37. ibid.,

## The formation of the Nyasaland African Congress<sup>38</sup>

Like many other educated Africans in Nyasaland, James F. Sangala, the acknowledged founder of the Nyasaland African Congress (N.A.C.), was fortunate in being employed in the civil service, in positions of some responsibility which were in neighbouring countries filled by Europeans and Indians. Whilst employed as a filing clerk in the D.C.'s office in Blantyre between 1930 and 1936 and as a clerk in the S.P.C.'s office in the same town from 1938 to 1939, Sangala was placed in a position to gain access to information as to the government's political intentions and socio-economic policies. Together with a number of other African civil servants, Sangala was thus able to acquire the knowledge which was to make him one of the leading participants in southern African pressure group politics of the 1930s. At the same time, Sangala was placed in an occupational environment in which he and his fellow government colleagues incessantly discussed and debated ways and means of bettering African conditions. In civil service offices in Blantyre and Zomba, Sangala had met and conversed with his life-long friend and President of the B.N.A., K. Ellerton Mposa, who was for years the trusted head clerk to the S.P.C.; come into closer contact from 1939 with fellow High Court colleague, Lewis Bandawe, whose long connexions

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38. For earlier discussions of the formation of the N.A.C., see Richard Gray, The Two Nations (London, 1960), pp.336-345, and Robert I. Rotberg, The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp.181-195.



with and experience of the Blantyre Mission was unrivalled among African government servants; and also become acquainted with Levi Mumba and his northern colleagues during his period of employment in Zomba in 1937.<sup>39</sup>

The most notable of the other associationists who became the initiators of Congress were Charles W. Mlanga, Charles J. Matinga and Isaac M. Lawrence.<sup>40</sup> All of them were products of the Blantyre Mission, were well known throughout southern Nyasaland, and were leading members of the southern Native Associations. Mlanga was the main African editor of the local vernacular newspaper, Zo Ona (known from 1937 as Nkhani za Nyasaland), and as a result of his father's connexions, his own occupation, and also through membership of the B.N.A. had come into contact with many Africans all over the central and southern regions. Matinga, a close friend of Mlanga, was initially an assistant storekeeper at the Zomba Public Works Department working under the head storekeeper, Levi Mumba. An office-bearer of the B.N.A. and later the Z.P.N.A., Matinga was also in touch with the R.C.N.P.N.A. and was one of the most prominent of the second generation Africans involved in southern politics. Lawrence, an Ngoni from Ncheu in the central region, worked with the

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39. This paragraph is based on interviews with Messrs. J.F. Sangala, L. Bandawe and the late K.E. Mposa, Blantyre, Malawi. Sangala was employed as chief typist at the Medical Headquarters in Zomba during 1937. In 1939 he was transferred from the S.P.C.'s office to the High Court in Blantyre where he became a clerk/typist.

40. 19a/58, Annual report of the Blantyre district for the year 1943, M.N.A., Zomba includes these three persons in its listing of the key figures in African political activity in the southern region.

railways in Limbe as a clerk and had for long been acquainted with African political movements both at home and abroad. Having married the sister of Dr. D.S. Malekebu, the head of the Providence Industrial Mission and founder of the C.D.N.A., Lawrence was also closely tied to the Chiradzulu district and its powerful history of protest.<sup>41</sup>

All of these afore-mentioned persons were leading southern African spokesmen. But, as has been suggested, they were not without any close contacts with northern Africans. The coming together of fairly well-educated men from all over Nyasaland in the townships of Blantyre and Limbe enabled individuals from different backgrounds to realize their shared problems and to discuss the possibility of common action for redress. The links which developed between the B.N.A., Z.P.N.A. and the R.C.N.P.N.A., particularly during the 1930s, not only fostered closer connexions between educated elements from the different regions but helped to forward the creation of a united African political movement. By the time of the outbreak of the second World War, the close occupational and political ties existing between the leaders of these southern-based Native Associations virtually made them a single and unified political force. Indeed, James Sangala has suggested that he was seriously considering organizing

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41. See S2/28/34, M.N.A., Zomba, for details of Lawrence's connexions with the P.I.M. and his political activities in neighbouring territories including his links with the militant American Negro movement led by Marcus Garvey. See also the Nyasaland Times, 24 September 1926, p.3 for some biographical information.



these Native Associations into an inclusive political movement especially after they had become so united during the 1938 campaign against 'closer union'. With the outbreak of the war, however, he was forced to shelve such plans as the government would not, under the circumstances, have permitted the emergence of a new African organization involved in agitational politics.

During the early war years, all of the Native Associations in the southern region were on the decline. Only occasional meetings were held by the R.C.N.P.N.A. which was suffering from discontinuity of its key leadership due to the transfer of Levi Mumba, J.D. Phiri and I.M. Jere to other parts of the Protectorate between 1937 and 1943. The B.N.A., torn by personal differences resulting from the 1938 split, was practically moribund and organized no further meetings after 1941. Yet Africans continued to preserve and develop the contacts which were to build up that corporate spirit so essential for later African political activity. Foremost among these Africans was still Levi Mumba. From his new centre of employment at Mzimba, he maintained a large correspondence with persons both at home and abroad, exchanging ideas and encouraging Africans in their work and political activities. Some of these letters, written to Africans throughout the Protectorate, urged them to realize the need for wider unity. A paragraph in a letter to Native Authority Mwase, the major Cewa chief in Nyasaland, is apposite in this context.

"But my chief it is not enough that we should merely get our people into such positions (Mwase had recently been appointed to the Native Welfare Committee and to the Central Labour Board); we have got to work hard both on these councils and outside them; we have got to keep in touch with the views and requirements not only of our own districts but of all our African community in Nyasaland so that we may have their full confidence, and if it were possible all recognized leaders of political, educational and religious thought should at times come into conference to exchange our experiences and views and learn from each other and thus be able to plan for best ways of procedure in our efforts to stand for our people and country." 42

On learning that "things are flat politically" with the Representative Committee in Zomba, Mumba replied to his close friend and chairman of the R.C.N.P.N.A., I.M. Jere:

"These are times of thinking of future reconstruction and it is well if our people were ready with their views. I hope at the meeting which they called for the 6th. December they talked of something important in the rebuilding of a strong organization." 43

Similar ideas of unity and reconstruction were being propagated by African civil servants and others in the southern townships of Blantyre and Zomba but wartime conditions most likely prevented them from translating such ideas into action. In June 1941, for example, after a football match at the Ndirande Welfare Club, one Mlenga, who had recently returned home from Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, informed those present that "the most interesting thing there was not the Tea and Scones they ate but that they met together as one people of one

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42. L.Z. Mumba to Native Authority Sam C. Mwase, 3 May 1941, in I.M. Jere papers.

43. L.Z. Mumba to I.M. Jere, 20 December 1941, in I.M. Jere papers.



nation. What really the country needs is cooperation. Unite and do things together. This place should be called a field where you would build up a greater Nyasaland."<sup>44</sup> Schemes of 'closer union', travel and migration abroad, and increasing interaction with fellow Nyasas in Blantyre and Zomba, were all contributing to the development of a strong national consciousness among many Africans. Ideas of unity were in the air and any of the leading African associationists could have inspired the formation of an organization to provide a forum for this nascent nationalism. But it was James Sangala, with his long experience of forming and organizing social groups such as the Ndirande Welfare Club,<sup>45</sup> spurred into action at the right moment by the attitude of the Anglo-African community, who will go down in history as the chief progenitor of the Nyasaland African Congress.

It may be asked why Levi Mumba and his northern associationists in the R.C.N.P.N.A., who had for years been preaching the need for unity, did not themselves initiate any direct moves towards the establishment of a territorial-wide political body. It seems as if only southern African leaders could successfully launch such a movement. African political leaders resident in the northern region had few direct links with their southern

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44. Cited in R. Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-2.

45. During the 1930s, Sangala was instrumental in starting up and organizing a number of social groups such as the Ndirande Welfare Club which made him well known in Blantyre. He also organized the multi-racial Black and White Club and was Secretary of the highly successful Shire Highlands Football League.

region counterparts to attempt creating a national political organization. This was not the case with the politically active northerners working in the Shire Highland townships. These, however, were always a minority who may have felt that their role was to stimulate local Africans to commence such an organization which they could then expand to other parts of the Protectorate. Moreover, with the transfer of Mumba and other leading Representative Committee officials to other regions, no prominent northern Africans were left in the south who enjoyed the respect and authority to unite southern and northern Africans successfully into a single body.<sup>46</sup>

It would, of course, be a mistake to try and explain the founding of Congress simply in terms of personal political initiative by Sangala. The formation of Congress coincided at that moment with the interests of other Africans. Nevertheless, it is of interest to examine the motives which inspired Sangala to launch the new movement.

In 1943, the Coloureds through their Anglo-African Association successfully memorialized the Governor and C.W.M. Cox, the Secretary of State's Adviser on Education, who was then visiting Nyasaland, demanding separate schools of their own, independent from those of Africans. They resented being classified as Africans or natives,

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46. This paragraph is based on interviews with Mr. J.D. Phiri (who was the Auditor of the R.C.N.P.N.A.), London, England.



desired to be treated more like Europeans, and were willing to pay European rates of tax if they could secure official recognition of their higher status. Their condescending attitude towards Africans annoyed Sangala. Their criticism of African educational standards confirmed him in his belief that not only had Africans to strive for improved educational facilities but that African pressures for change and reform would only prove effective if they were presented by a unified African force. For years, Sangala, an ex-teacher at Domasi Mission School, had been concerned about African education and had in 1938 set up the Educational Parents Association one of the objectives of which was to challenge the decision by the Blantyre Mission not to permit African girls to study beyond standard three.<sup>47</sup> It was, however, Coloured unity to promote their cause that stirred Sangala into action. If Coloureds could unite and if Europeans had already successfully done so in their Convention of Associations, why could not Africans too organize themselves and collectively express their views and in concert seek their salvation?<sup>48</sup>

Consulting his friend Mposa, seeking the advice of colleague Bandawe, and touring the five villages near Ndirande where the bulk of the educated southern Africans

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47. See NSB5/1/4, Annual report for Blantyre district for the year 1938 for details of this Association, M.N.A., Zomba.

48. This and the following paragraphs are based on interviews with J.F. Sangala, L. Bandawe and K.E. Mposa, Blantyre, Malawi.

lived,<sup>49</sup> the popular and well-known Sangala began searching for organizational ways in which to express his newly-formed political thoughts. Through his social and welfare activities, Sangala had come to possess a wide circle of acquaintances who now encouraged him in his plans to form a united African movement. With the tide of events turning in favour of the Allies in the War, thus eliminating any possible conquest of Africa, Sangala decided to launch his 'Educated African Council'.

Realizing that John Chilembwe's complaints and protests during the early months of World War 1 had turned the colonial authorities hostile to African criticism, he wanted to be certain that the government would look sympathetically upon his proposed Council and consequently visited and obtained favourable assurances from the Senior Provincial Commissioner, Eric Smith.

With official toleration providing a favourable milieu, Sangala invited twenty-one people from Blantyre-Limbe to attend a meeting on August 19, 1943, at which it was decided to form the Nyasaland Educated African Council, and to hold another meeting soon to put the idea before the people.<sup>50</sup> A few weeks later, on September 2, a

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49. These five villages, all in very close proximity to one another, were Maunde, Masangano, Citendere, Makata and Matope, and situated around Ndirande. Nearly all the prominent B.N.A. members and begetters of Congress lived there. These included Sangala, Matinga, Mlanga, Lawrence, A.J. Mponda, L. Makata. Sangala also discussed his ideas with K.T. Motsete, a Tswana-speaking teacher at Blantyre Secondary School.

50. Although a comprehensive list of those who attended this meeting is not available, it probably included the following: Matinga, Mlanga, Lawrence, Bandawe, A.I. Ndovie, T.R. Grant, A.J. Mponda, H. Chokani, K. Thipa, J. Phambala, G. Ngolleka, H. and C. Machinjili.



general meeting was held attended by over ninety Africans from Blantyre and Limbe townships, at which the whole scheme was approved, though it was decided to drop the term 'Educated' from the title of the new organization.<sup>51</sup> To fulfil the conditions of the title it was decided to get in touch with "Africans in all other Districts in Nyasaland," and Sangala subsequently saw the local District Commissioner, Eric Barnes, about the possibility of publishing a circular letter in the Nyasaland Times, Nkhani za Nyasaland and other newspapers. Permission for this to be done was granted, the letter was published and the movement launched.

Dated October 1, 1943, the circular letter, which was also sent privately to leading African politicians in the Protectorate, explained that the "chief reason" for forming the Council was "because experience has taught that unity is strength." Now was the time for Africans "in this country to fight for their freedom, progress and development of Nyasaland from one field." Africans in Blantyre and Limbe had therefore started the Council "which should be the mouthpiece of the (educated) Africans." Unlike the inter-war Native Associations, the Council would deal with "matters affecting the Protectorate generally," and that meetings would be held "once or twice every year at which all the Districts (would) be

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51. Ass. 4/13, J.F. Sangala to S.P.C., 3 September 1943, M.N.A., Zomba. It should be noted that the original file containing correspondence and official minutes on the formation of Congress (Nat.34/1) is missing from the Zomba Archives. The file Ass.4/13 contains duplicates of some of the original letters but no government minutes.

represented." It would continue the tradition of operating constitutionally and would "cooperate with the Government, Commercials, Planters, Missionaries and Native Authorities in any matters necessary to speed up the progress of Nyasaland." In conclusion, the long letter called for as many Africans as possible to "enlist themselves for membership" to "make our voice heard" so that "our race should have a place amongst the civilized races." 52

A new sense of urgency and militancy could be detected in this letter. Concern was aroused in official circles by the use of such phrases as "to fight for their freedom." When questioned about this phrase, Sangala replied that he had not meant to convey the idea of Africans entering "into armed conflict against the Europeans for the sake of obtaining self-government" but that "as self-government eventually must come...the sooner they started to do something for themselves the better." If a struggle was to occur, Sangala maintained, it would be among Africans themselves "to stir the people out of their lethargy." But even though the government may have been reassured of the constitutionality of the new organization, the new mood of urgency was still very apparent in Sangala's subsequent remarks. The existence of pass restrictions <sup>in Nyas?</sup> and the complete absence of African representation in the Legislative Council showed clearly, he averred, that "the Nyasaland Natives (were) a

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52. ibid., J.F. Sangala to P.Cs., Blantyre and Lilongwe, 1 October 1943 with enclosed circular letter.



subordinate race" and so they would remain if "they (did) nothing themselves to improve their lot." <sup>53</sup>

After Sangala had made the required amendments to his original circular letter, <sup>54</sup> the government reiterated its satisfaction with the new movement but proposed that it be called the Nyasaland African Association (Ny.A.A.) as the term 'Council' conflicted with the business of chiefs and was likely to cause confusion. <sup>55</sup> Levi Mumba concurred in this reasoning and in a letter drew Sangala's attention to the fact that "a council is a body appointed by government, Missions or municipalities" and it would therefore not be an "appropriate" name for "our organization." He suggested that either Congress or Convention (after the European body in Blantyre) be adopted instead. Mumba may also have shared the government's concern regarding the new militant spirit evident in the circular letter for he asked Sangala to consider "asking government for a body as the Representative Council in South Africa" which was "a government appointment representing both chiefs and educated people." Such a body, he suggested, "should meet say once a year together with Europeans as guiders and pass their recommendations for government consideration." Nevertheless, despite this strong moderate gloss, Mumba congratulated Sangala on his "bold bid" to get "African intellectuals

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53. ibid., D.C., Blantyre, to P.C., Blantyre, 8 October 1943 relating interview with Sangala.

54. ibid., J.F. Sangala to P.Cs., Blantyre and Lilongwe, 11 October 1943.

55. ibid., C.S. to P.C., Blantyre, 20 October 1943.

to unite" and proposed that the dormant Native Associations be circularized and revived at once, "and when they have risen to get them to unite." 56

Sangala's circular letter had also invited suggestions regarding the aims and constitution of the new body. After these had been received, both from within Nyasaland and without, Levi Mumba was asked to draft the constitution which he presented for discussion and approval to the select committee of the Ny.A.A. in February 1944. Following his recommendations, the name of the movement was changed to that of the Nyasaland African Congress and it was agreed that "Existing District Associations, Societies and other bodies which are not functioning at present should be reorganized." It was probably realized that by reviving them and rallying them around the new organization, they would thus provide it with ready-made blocks of popular support and thereby serve as instruments in spreading its influence throughout the Protectorate. At places "Where there are no Societies," the Congress constitution would "be forwarded to the head of the communities who thereafter shall organize branches." 57

Other influences were at work in guiding the leaders of this newly-founded political group. A week after the circular letter had appeared in the local press, Sangala was visited by W.H. Timcke, a well-known European

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56. L.Z. Mumba to J.F. Sangala, 16 October 1943, in C.C. Chinula papers.

57. Minutes of a meeting of the select committee of the Nyasaland African Association held on 11 February 1944, in I.M. Jere papers.



settler, who had for a number of years been championing the rights of Africans and critically commenting on the character of European rule. Levi Mumba had conferred with Timcke on a few occasions and urged other Africans to do so as well as "he is very much interested in the upliftment of the African."<sup>58</sup> Sangala had had no previous personal acquaintance with Timcke who now offered his services to the leaders of the new movement and began to provide them with sympathetic advice and some funds. He introduced Sangala to the prominent South African trade unionist, W.G. Ballinger, who began transmitting tracts and pamphlets on trade union and political topics. Soon Timcke was helping to correct and draft some of the many letters which Sangala and others were having to write; urging Sangala to look carefully at how the European Convention of Associations functioned; and assisting Congress leaders in the voicing of African grievances either to the government or to individuals abroad, such as Arthur Creech Jones, sincere Afrophile and founder and president of the Fabian Colonial Bureau in London.<sup>59</sup> In Britain again, Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda, then practising medicine at South Shields, was sending letters

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58. L.Z. Mumba to I.M. Jere, 27 October 1937, in I.M. Jere papers. See also Ass.4/13 for speech by C.J. Matinga, president of the N.A.C., delivered on 23 September 1946 on Timcke's role as "a champion of the African cause." For some background details on Timcke, see NSE 1/15/1, W.H. Timcke to D.C., Cholo, 17 April 1939, M.N.A., Zomba.

59. For further details on Timcke aiding Sangala, see R.I. Rotberg (Nationalism in Central Africa), op. cit., pp.182-6.

of encouragement and advice to Sangala and assisting the new organization with small but useful financial contributions. These contacts with Dr. Banda were to be the most important external links for the subsequent development of Congress and it would be convenient here to consider briefly his career and contribution to Nyasaland politics up to 1945.<sup>60</sup>

Born around the turn of the century near Kasungu, in the central region, Banda had left Nyasaland for South Africa in 1915 after only completing standard three education at the local Free Church school. Working initially as an ordinary labourer and later as an interpreter in a compound on the Rand goldfields, he joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1922 which, three years later, sponsored his journey to the United States to enable him to further his education. After attending high school in Ohio, Banda took a degree at the University of Chicago and qualified as a doctor at the Meharry Medical College in Tennessee in 1937. The following year he arrived in Britain "with a view to qualifying for a British medical diploma, which is essential for registration in the United Kingdom and, consequently, in Nyasaland."<sup>61</sup> At his third attempt, Banda secured the necessary qualifications in 1941 but wartime conditions

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60. For more detailed biographical information on Dr. Banda, see R.I. Rotberg (Nationalism in Central Africa), *op. cit.*, pp.186-9; T. Cullen Young and Hastings Banda, eds., *Our African Way of Life* (London, 1946), pp. 26-7; and Edwin S. Munger, "President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi: Bridgebuilder of Africa," *American Universities Field Staff* (Central and Southern Africa Series), 13, 1 (1969).

61. C.O.525/177, No.44034/8, H.K. Banda to C.O., 29 June 1939, P.R.O., London.



prevented him from taking up a colonial medical appointment in Nyasaland. Instead, he set up a private practice on Tyneside. Throughout these years Banda kept up a regular correspondence with many Africans in Nyasaland. He sent them small sums of money, paid for their subscriptions to British newspapers, and continuously encouraged them in their activities.<sup>62</sup> He also kept in close touch with political developments within the Protectorate and in 1938, whilst in Britain, submitted a memorandum to the Bledisloe Commission. In his homeland, his return was awaited with interest. "We are looking forward with great expectation to have you as our Aggrey" wrote Mumba in 1939.<sup>63</sup> His failure to return did not diminish his interest in his country's affairs. Banda joined Congress from the start though he probably had little direct influence beyond encouragement on its organizational emergence in 1944.

All of these growing influences and contacts not only helped to guide and direct the actions of Sangala and the select committee of the Ny.A.A. but also maintained and perhaps stimulated the new militant spirit which had been developing since the time of the Bledisloe

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62. Annual Reports of the Provincial Commissioners for year ended 1938, p.60 where it is reported that Chief Mwase receives the Manchester Guardian Weekly from Dr. Banda. I am indebted to the Rev. H.M. Phiri of Kasungu, Malawi, for showing me a number of letters to him from Dr. Banda during the 1930s and 1940s.

63. L.Z. Mumba to H.K. Banda, 15 February 1939 in I.M. Jere papers. For a discussion of Dr. Aggrey in a Nyasaland context, see George Shepperson, "Nyasaland and the Millennium," in Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed., Millennial Dreams in Action (The Hague, 1962), pp.144-5.

Commission. Persistent European demands for amalgamation, both in the 1930s and during the war years, had heightened African fears about their future.<sup>64</sup> The high idealism and intellectual ferment of World War 11, which was to be found in such documents and pronouncements as the widely-publicized Atlantic Charter, may also have operated to provoke among educated Africans a new attitude of impatience with the rate of political and socio-economic change in Nyasaland. The new militancy and urgency was clearly evident at a meeting of the committee of the Ny.A.A. held in January 1944 to prepare for an interview with the Anglican Bishop of Nyasaland who had recently been appointed to represent African interests in the Legislative Council. Missionaries were roundly condemned for having done nothing in recent years "to improve our conditions." They "never bother to suggest how the Africans would be relieved from the land shortage"; know "that the Code doing with the education is low but they still carry on in the same way"; and that they "are supposed to be the Africans' agents to help checking these mass emigrations and instead of doing so they decline to pay the Africans a living wage." No longer could Africans "trust them" to "be our mouthpiece to the matters which we suffer oppression" and they wanted "to see their own

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64. Nat.12/38, S.P.C. to C.S., 20 July 1942, enclosure extract of minutes of the Mlanje Native Association held on 25 April 1942, M.N.A., Zomba. These minutes stated that Africans in Nyasaland were "always alarmed to hear about the proposed amalgamation question" and that means other than union with Southern Rhodesia should be found to develop the country.



African chosen (to represent them) who understands the position."<sup>65</sup> At the subsequent interview with the Bishop, which was held in the presence of government officials, missionaries and unofficial members of the Legislative Council, Charles Matinga, who had been asked to prepare a statement, went even further in ventilating African criticisms of the attitudes and behaviour of missionaries in recent years. After paying tribute to the work of the early missionaries whom Africans had looked upon "almost as their fathers and guardians," he denounced those who had arrived during the inter-war period as having "introduced colour prejudice" and discrimination. Although they "know how we suffer," they have, Matinga declared, "never tried to propose any scheme to relieve us from poverty and diseases." "In fact" he claimed, "any thing that makes a race progress have been denied us and what has been done is to tell us to look for things that are in store in the next world while others so privileged because of their fair colour are making use of all and everything in this world." Africans could now not accept "anything short of an African representative in the Legislative Council." In a radical departure from traditional utterances, Matinga even demanded "majority representation" for Africans in both the central

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65. Ass.4/13, Minutes of meeting of the select committee of the Ny.A.A. held on 21 January 1944. See also A.C. Ross, The Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Mission Blantyre, Nyasaland 1875-1926, Ph.D. Edinburgh, 1968, p.345: "...the new missionaries of the 1920s and 1930s did become much more out of touch with African feelings."

legislature and all other "Boards that affect our welfare in the country," though it is not clear if he saw this as an immediate requirement. Matinga further called for more responsible positions in the civil service and in commercial sectors, salaries equivalent to those "enjoyed by Europeans," better teachers and "not evangelists," the right to organize trade unions and the return and restoration of land taken away from Africans and which remained undeveloped.<sup>66</sup>

This vehement tenor of African protest took government aback. The bitter racial criticisms were unprecedented. Officials feared that the language of moderation was in danger of giving way to a new note of militant radicalism and discussion took place to decide whether government should reconsider its decision to permit the movement to continue operating. Congress leaders were henceforward closely watched and their meetings carefully investigated. Sangala's mail was intercepted and scrutinized and police detectives were assigned to report on the proceedings of any gatherings he held. Realizing that he was under surveillance and that the future of the movement was threatened, Sangala sought to ensure that any anxieties were quickly allayed. "Whatever we do is above board" he wrote to the Chief Secretary. "We have the honour" he continued, "to assure the Government that it will have nothing to fear from us."<sup>67</sup>

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66. Ass.4/13, report of a meeting between Bishop Thorne and a delegation of the Ny.A.A. held on 28 January 1944.  
67. ibid., J.F. Sangala to C.S., 24 February 1944.



Fortunately for Sangala, a number of influential administrators, whom he had worked for over the years, declared themselves satisfied that he was not a political danger and a person liable to foment subversive activity. As for the new Congress organization, once again, as in the case of the Native Associations during the 1930s, it was feared that repression might serve to force the movement underground. Instead, it was hoped that with the creation of the proposed provincial councils the widening of constitutional channels would help to "train" the educated Africans "the way we want them" and that many of the reasons for forming the Congress would be absolved.<sup>68</sup> The government had, however, already lost the initiative to Sangala and his colleagues) though the latter had probably become aware of the need for less radical articulation of their demands.

After the February 1944 meeting which approved the aim and constitution of the Congress, Sangala and others commenced touring the Protectorate advertizing the N.A.C. and urging people to unite and support the movement. Considerable emphasis was placed on gaining the support of the chiefs as well as the educated elements. In May 1944, for instance, a large meeting was convened for the purpose of introducing Congress "to the Native Authorities and the people of Blantyre and Chiradzulu Districts," at which it was agreed to support the N.A.C. morally and

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68. R.I. Rotberg (Nationalism in Central Africa), op. cit., pp.191-2.

financially."<sup>69</sup> Similar, though smaller, meetings seem to have been held in other districts throughout the country. Congress leaders had thus begun the onerous task of erecting the basic apparatus for the growth of a nationwide movement partly through the revival of political consciousness among the remnants of the inter-war Native Associations and partly through trying to win the support of traditional authorities. But few chiefs were present at the inaugural meeting of Congress which was held in Blantyre in October 1944. Nevertheless, delegates from branches from all over Nyasaland were present including representatives from a few interest groups which had become affiliated to the N.A.C.<sup>70</sup> It was therefore already a national organization largely representative of educated Africans and the more prosperous farmers. It had yet to be seen whether Congress could acquire the backing of the Native Authorities and the masses.

Levi Mumba was elected the first President-General of the Nyasaland African Congress. His ability and reputation continued to be widely recognized. Over two hundred and fifty Africans heard Mumba deliver his last

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69. Ass.4/13, Minutes of a general meeting of the N.A.C. held on 20 May 1944.

70. There were Congress branches within Nyasaland at Blantyre, Limbe, Mlanje, Cholo, Zomba, Fort Johnston, Lilongwe, Malimba, Dowa, Dedza, Nkhota-Khota, Mzimba, and Karonga. There was also a Johannesburg branch in South Africa. Other delegates represented the Mombera Dairies Cooperative Society, the Mlanje Foodstuff Growers' Association, the Nyasaland Railways Social and Recreation Association. And there were also representatives from Native Associations which were still active at Livingstonia, Likoma Island, Port Herald and Chiromo.



major speech before his sudden death on January 23, 1945. He spoke at length, vigorously but with characteristic moderation. He voiced the demand for African political representation, declared that Africans desired "full citizenship" with all the other racial groups and stated that they wanted "opportunities for all regardless of race, colour or creed." He protested against discrimination, condemned schemes of amalgamation with Southern Rhodesia, and urged government to provide better educational facilities. But the idea of self-government and independence still remained unuttered. Mumba and the early Congress leaders<sup>71</sup> continued to look to government to better African conditions. The N.A.C. constitution stated that the aim of Congress was "To work for unity of the aborigines of Nyasaland....in order that a well-digested native opinion may be available and ascertainable by the Government and other constituted bodies working for the uplift and development of the African people."<sup>72</sup> Only much later did petition and constitutional protest give way to a more militant nationalism seeking a new political and social order.

For the time being, however, Congress represented no radical departure from the Native Associations. There

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71. C.J. Matinga became vice-president general; C.W. Mlangi, secretary-general; J.D. Phiri, assistant secretary-general; H.R. Tung'ande, second assistant secretary-general; I.M. Lawrence, treasurer-general; and H.B. Dallah, assistant treasurer-general. Sangala, it should be noted, had been transferred to the D.C.'s office in Dedza in September and was unable to attend the inaugural meeting of Congress.

72. Nyasaland African Congress: Constitution of the Organization (Blantyre, 1944).

was continuity in leadership and approach. Although a territorial movement it did not seek territorial control and continued to direct its demands to the colonial authority. Its language was still loyal and its organization lacked a mass following. But its ambition was new and it had assumed a new role of urgency.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Beginnings of the Politics of Mass Nationalism.

#### The frustrations of early territorial African politics

Two main subjects dominated the deliberations and efforts of the Nyasaland African Congress during the first five years of its existence - education and political representation. A chain of resolutions was passed and a medley of memoranda dispatched to the colonial authorities urging them to improve the quality and scope of African education and also to appoint Africans to the Legislative Council. Delegations were arranged to meet the Governor on these two topics and a deputation was sent to London to place before the Colonial Office "our educational needs." Both of these subjects were crucial elements in any discussion of African progress and they constituted the key planks in Congress' broader strategy for social and political advance.

Congress wanted African education to "be taken over entirely by the Government" as the mission societies "are unable to establish adequately staffed and properly supervised schools owing to lack of sufficient funds." Reasons were also detailed as to why "our relations with the Missionaries are not happy ones" and it was consequently felt that "we can no longer entrust our education and the future of our country to them." This did not mean,

a Congress memorandum declared, that Africans did not "realize the necessity of maintaining Moral Instruction," and it was hoped that religious instruction would continue to be provided in government-controlled schools "because it gives the pupils a better background in their character." A further Congress proposal propounded that as Nyasaland was "becoming more westernized," the medium of instruction in African schools, even at the very lowest levels, should be in English. Finally, in accordance with the new demand for greater African participation in boards and councils directly affecting the lives of the indigenous population, Congress called for majority African representation on the Advisory Committee on Education.<sup>1</sup>

As far as direct African political representation was concerned, N.A.C. leaders hoped that the Governor would "agree with us that there are many matters affecting our welfare which, if Government wants to do justice, require our explanation and participation in the Legislative Council." And they proceeded to specify at length the many matters which needed rectifying, cataloguing a formidable indictment against the British and their neglect of African welfare and development. These were of territorial or national concern to African interests and welfare) and were cited as follows:

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1. Ass.4/13, N.A.C. memorandum on education and political representation submitted to the C.S. for the consideration of the Governor, 16 May 1945, M.N.A., Zomba.



"For instance emigration of male African adults and the breakdown of family life in the villages; the unbearable poverty among our people; lack of agricultural development; the deplorable health and increasing infant mortality among the African people; the inefficient system of education which has led to neglect of our girls' education and has kept the country unprogressive; colour bar and misunderstandings between Africans and members of other races in the country; complete lack of social services among the African people; failure to introduce a cost of living allowance for Africans; the welfare of African soldiers; absence of trading facilities for Africans in this country; juvenile delinquency; filthy and congested system of communication in this country; low wages for African teachers and labourers; unorganized village settlement among the African people; the prison system of the country, etc.,"

Since it regarded itself as a body representing all African associations in the country, the N.A.C. wanted to "nominate four members and submit the names to Your Excellency for their appointment and Your Excellency should appoint two members from the panel of chiefs so that there shall be six African representatives on the Council."<sup>2</sup> This proposal, if accepted, would have made the number of Africans in the legislature equal to the number of European unofficials, one of whom was the missionary representative.

The colonial government gave careful consideration to Congress demands on both of these subjects. The immediate acceptance of the proposal that responsibility for African education should be assumed by government was deemed impracticable for financial reasons. On the other issue, Congress was informed that the Governor would soon set up a Protectorate Council (composed of representatives

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2. ibid.,

from the recently-created Provincial Councils in which chiefs comprised the majority of members) from which he would attempt to find a suitable candidate to serve on the Legislative Council.<sup>3</sup> The N.A.C. was dissatisfied with these responses and at its second annual conference in 1945 called for the appointment of a Royal Commission to enquire into African education.<sup>4</sup> Even when this suggestion was also rejected, Congress leaders remained undismayed. In the following year, the annual conference decided to appeal to Nyasas throughout the Protectorate and abroad to subscribe money to send a deputation to Britain "to bring to the notice of the British Parliament...this state of African education in Nyasaland."<sup>5</sup> Before leaving for London, the Congress President, C.J. Matinga, led a delegation to the Governor to discuss with him a statement of the matters which the N.A.C. intended to raise in England. Together with the Director of Education, the Governor was able to revise some of the Congress arguments, mainly on financial grounds, but they were unable to deal satisfactorily with a number of other matters raised in the educational memorandum.<sup>6</sup> Congress therefore went ahead with the sending of two delegates to London. Here they were joined by Dr. H.K. Banda, who had

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3. ibid., C.S. to N.A.C., 15 November 1945.

4. ibid., Minutes of annual conference of N.A.C., 16 and 19 October 1945.

5. ibid., Minutes of annual conference of N.A.C., 23-6 September 1946.

6. ibid., Record of meeting between the Acting Governor and deputation of N.A.C., 24 September 1947.



in 1945 been appointed the official Congress representative in London, and together they interviewed the Secretary of State.

Congress leaders also criticized the new official provisions for the appointment of Africans to the Legislative Council especially as the N.A.C. would not be directly involved in their selection. It thus asked Dr. Banda to draw the "attention of the Secretary of State... of this discrepancy." <sup>7</sup> Banda, whom members of the Congress executive committee commended in 1946 for his "encouragement and his concrete advices," continued actively to promote the Nyasa cause in Britain. He made contact with and lobbied several Members of Parliament who raised questions about Nyasaland in the House of Commons, and he was constantly in touch with and assisted by the Fabian Colonial Bureau. He further prepared a memorandum covering matters discussed at the 1945 annual conference of Congress and submitted it to the Secretary of State. <sup>8</sup> At the same time, Banda continued to correspond regularly with leading Congress officials and donated small sums of money not only to the N.A.C. but to other institutions of African development such as the Blantyre Night School. For instance, he provided C.C. Chinula, Vice President of Congress, with some financial assistance to run his independent African schools and also paid for him to become a member of the Fabian Colonial Bureau and

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7. ibid., Minutes of executive committee conference of the N.A.C., 20 April 1946.

8. ibid., Minutes of annual conference of N.A.C., 23-6 September 1946.

receive its publications. "I want you and other Congress leaders" wrote Banda, "to know what goes on outside Nyasaland. Such publications as the Empire and others, keep you in touch with the outside world." <sup>9</sup>

But the bulk of Congress agitation proved fruitless. Although the government recognized the N.A.C. and agreed to consider its viewpoints, it did little to placate general Congress anxiety about African welfare and development and introduce the social and political reforms that were being demanded. The influence of Congress upon government policy was negligible. Indeed, the government felt that Congress' aim was "to make political capital for their own organization rather than to bring constructive criticism to bear on the problems to which they have turned their attention." <sup>10</sup> Dismay with the pace of change led to a certain disillusionment in the N.A.C. by 1949, especially after the initial flush of enthusiasm. In fact, only five years after its inception, Congress had become a far cry from its original confident and zealous self.

Governmental insistence that native policy should continue to rest primarily on the Protectorate's

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9. H.K. Banda to C.C. Chinula, 5 March 1947, C.C. Chinula papers. At the executive committee meeting of the N.A.C., 8-9 April 1950, J.F. Sangala, the provisional president, thanked Dr. Banda "not only for sending donations to Congress and the Blantyre African Night School, but because of his frequent correspondence giving Congress full cooperation." Minutes of this meeting are contained in the Nyasaland Times, 1 May 1950, p.2.

10. Ass.4/13, Acting Governor Brown to C.O., 10 May 1947 and C.O. to Brown, 10 July 1947, M.N.A., Zomba.



indigenous institutions was partly instrumental in retarding the early development of the N.A.C. as the major forum for the expression of African views. The formation of Congress had quickly provoked the government into establishing its own large-scale structures for African opinion. By the end of 1944, Provincial Councils had been set up and, two years later, the Protectorate Council held its first meeting. Members of these Councils consisted of representatives from the Native Authorities, who were in a majority, and also some commoners, most of whom were Congress supporters. It was clear that the government was thus beginning to see the need to widen the basis of political participation, particularly for the articulate new elite, but it continued to insist on the chiefs constituting a majority of members in its new constitutional channels for the expression of African opinion. The Protectorate and Provincial Councils possessed purely advisory roles and were not expected to interfere with the actual working of Native Authorities. Because of their semi-official character, as a result of government influence in their proceedings, Congress leaders regarded the Councils as ineffective instruments for the representation of African views. Congress leaders considered that the Councils were in no position to prosecute the African case forcefully as they considered necessary. Nevertheless, their creation provided an alternative forum to the N.A.C. and may have diverted energy which might otherwise have gone into the activities of Congress. The Congress President, Charles Matinga, also

believed that the progress of the N.A.C. had been hindered by the formation of these Councils with their official status as they had "acted as a check on the part of the Chiefs (as leaders of the people) not to co-operate with the masses" and not to support "our movement." And he further felt that district officers were in some places "dividing the opinions of the people by encouraging Chiefs to misapprehend the schemes of our local branches." <sup>11</sup> Through the creation of its new Councils and through the actions of its officials, the colonial government was still determined not to encourage the new African elite to claim rights as spokesmen for the mass of the people.

But the most important factors which precipitated the decline of Congress were of an internal nature and revolved particularly round its leadership. A severe blow had struck the Congress executive from the start. Within a few months of its inaugural meeting, it had lost the services of both its leading and experienced officers - Levi Mumba and Isa M. Lawrence, President and Treasurer respectively. Within eighteen months, Congress had also lost the services of W.H. Timcke when he was drowned in the M.V. Vipya disaster on Lake Nyasa. Forthwith, the N.A.C. came to be characterized by weak and inefficient leadership. C.J. Matinga and H. Tung'ande, who had respectively replaced Mumba and Lawrence, were in 1948 forced to resign from their offices, one for embezzlement of Congress funds, the other for sheer ineptitude. In the

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11. ibid., Presidential address to annual conference of N.A.C., 22-5 September 1947.



same year, Matinga was also found to have conspired to prevent the Vice-President of Congress, the Rev. C.C. Chinula, from taking his rightful place on the educational deputation to London, an action which discredited the movement even further. Some of Matinga's shortcomings may now be looked at briefly.

In early 1948, Matinga was reported to be in serious financial distress, being in debt to the sum of at least £150. Writing confidentially about this, the Congress Secretary stated that Matinga "has a High Court judgement, heavy various bills apart from the maintenance of his foreign wife, etc.,"<sup>12</sup> To make the trip to London as a member of the educational deputation, Matinga was granted leave from his civil service post but without any pay. The N.A.C. decided to grant him a disturbance allowance but Matinga appears to have asked also for Congress to indemnify him from court action regarding his debts before he agreed to proceed to London. He seems to have held the view that his hard work for the movement and the expenses he had personally incurred on its business justified the organization helping him in his present moment of need.<sup>13</sup> Congress, however, was in no financial position to help him and Matinga seems to have been very desirous of going to England. Shortly before

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12. A.J. Mponda, Secretary-General, to C.C. Chinula, Vice-President General, 7 April 1948, C.C. Chinula papers.

13. A.C.S. to A.J. Mponda, 19 March 1948; Mponda to Chinula, 7 April 1948; and C.J. Matinga to Mponda, 5 April 1948, all in C.C. Chinula papers.

his departure for London, therefore, he appropriated £162 from the educational appeal fund. As to why Matinga took the Congress Secretary, A.J. Mponda, with him to England even though C.C. Chinula, the appointed delegate, followed them both to Cape Town and attempted to make them change their minds, is more difficult to explain. Arguments of tribalism have been put forward as both Matinga and Mponda were fellow Yao as well as being close friends. It is also possible that Matinga may have taken some of the educational funds with the knowledge of Mponda whom he rewarded with a trip to London. Whatever the reason, Chinula wrote subsequently in a manner which conveyed some of the tragedy of the whole case: "After much hardship, I reached Cape Town on 23.4.48. I was at the docks early at 6a.m. on the 24.4.48. The Bwanas reached the docks at 11 o'clock. They found me waiting for them, and without telling me they were to leave me again, and without supplying me with a half-penny even - and worst of all - without bidding me good-bye - they left for London." <sup>14</sup> These events rocked the Congress for a while especially as they involved three leading officers of the movement. <sup>15</sup>

Coupled with a weak and occasionally corrupt leadership was a loose federal political organization whereby Congress branches enjoyed complete autonomy

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14. Chinula to J.F. Sangala, Acting Secretary-General, 31 August 1948, C.C. Chinula papers.

15. For a more detailed account of these events, see Minutes of a Central Body Advisory Committee meeting of the N.A.C. held on 27 June 1948, C.C. Chinula papers.



without any effective attempt by central leaders to hold them together under a nationally-directed policy. The N.A.C. had officers and an executive committee chosen by its branches at an annual conference but co-ordination between the centre and the branches remained weak. Since most of the N.A.C.'s income was raised locally, the absence of effective financial arrangements encouraged opportunities for misappropriation of funds by officials at all levels. Yet when Dr. Banda suggested in 1946 that Congress monies be centralized, "kept in one bag," and local branches not be permitted to determine their own financial affairs, the executive committee remained unimpressed. When Dr. Banda, again, volunteered to pay the salary of a full-time organizing officer, Congress defeated the proposal.<sup>16</sup> Banda had realized another weakness of the movement; it lacked paid officers on a full-time basis. But the need for professional efficiency and organization were still not appreciated by Congress. Failure to recognize their importance constituted a major source of weakness of the N.A.C. and contributed to the Matinga crises of 1948. More importantly, it reflected Congress' approach to political change which was proving

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16. Ass.4/13, Minutes of executive committee conference of N.A.C., 20 April 1946 and Minutes of annual conference of N.A.C., 23-6 September 1946. See also Robert I. Rotberg, The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp.177-9. Rotberg is not correct in assuming that Congress agreed to Dr. Banda's first proposal. In fact, it was defeated by 15 votes to 8. With regard to his second proposal, a sub-committee of the Congress recommended that the Secretary-General be paid an annual salary of £60 plus £3 house allowance. This was defeated by 24 votes to 8 by delegates at a general meeting. Instead, a request was made to Banda to buy a typewriter and provide a sum of £18 per annum for the salary of the Secretary-General and his assistants.

ineffective in achieving any significant reforms.

Little interest seems to have been shown by the Congress leadership in such prosaic matters as organization. Up to 1951, Congress minutes record only two occasions when administrative organization was debated and both of these were the result of Dr. Banda's aforementioned proposals. It is clear from this attitude that Congress leaders did not appreciate the extent of the African struggle to obtain social and political reforms. In terms of method and strategy, the N.A.C. continued to be reminiscent of the Native Associations operating within the colonial frame of reference and continuing to direct its demands to the colonial government. Congress believed that patient and constant pressure on government through the passage of resolutions and the dispatch of memorials and petitions would ultimately induce it to grant Africans their rights and lead to increasing African acceptance into the modern world. Such a gradualist approach invoked no need to reorganize Congress on a different basis. There was no appreciation of the need to build up a popular movement and adopt a militant and uncompromising approach to political change. This was clearly illustrated in the negative reaction of Congress to a letter which it received from a retired European administrative officer, C.A. Cardew, who outlined ways in which the movement could become more popularly based and more efficiently organized.

"Congress needs a monthly paper to disseminate information," recommended Cardew, particularly as Africans



"in the outlying parts of Nyasaland know nothing of Congress." He also proposed the construction of official buildings as they "will lend dignity to your organization ....inspire confidence and increase efficiency. The people will then take a pride in their Congress." Cardew further suggested the payment of adequate salaries to office-holders, clerks and assistants "so that they may give their whole time and attention to their work." Furthermore, "Paid agents should be stationed in the various Districts and should travel about...and should instruct and encourage the people to do their duty by Congress." 17

Copies of this letter were circulated to members of the executive committee but no formal discussion seems to have taken place on its contents. Even Cardew's detailed suggestions as to how greater funds could be raised to finance Congress operations evoked no comment or discussion, although the N.A.C.'s financial position was rather precarious. Only during the 1950s, after constant failure to achieve significant reforms, did petition and constitutional protest give way to a more militant nationalism in seeking to forward African progress through organized African strength on a mass scale.

By 1949, Congress had a broken political leadership, an essentially unorganized collection of branches and affiliated societies, and an atmosphere of dismay and disillusionment pervading it consequent upon its ineffectiveness to achieve significant change. In early

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17. C.A. Cardew to the Secretary-General, N.A.C., 22 January 1947, C.C. Chinula papers.

1948, it was also reported that "the Central Body is at present insolvent and only lives on the Education Deputation Fund." <sup>18</sup> Had it not been for the £200 legacy that W.H. Timcke left to Congress becoming available in mid-1948, it is suggested that the movement would have probably collapsed. Yet the N.A.C. had begun to obtain support from a very wide area both within Nyasaland and abroad. Branches had been opened in most of the districts throughout the Protectorate and a number of other economic and social groups were affiliated to it. Support was also coming from Congress branches which Nyasa migrant workers had started up in neighbouring countries. All this indicated that there were many people outside of headquarters who saw the need for a national-wide African organization and wanted to see Congress continue functioning. Although Congress did not command a mass following, it was clear that many of its branches were beginning to expand while some were becoming more militant as a result of growing mass discontent. We shall examine the main sources of mass discontent in some detail subsequently but it is important to note here briefly that there was developing a hostility towards the European which was to become sufficiently general by the early 1950s to provide Congress with large-scale support.

There had been little open hostility to Nyasaland's participation in the second World War. Africans had affirmed their loyalty and many thousands had enlisted

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18. A.J. Mponda to C.C. Chinula, 7 April 1948, C.C. Chinula papers.



for service. Nobody had attempted to exploit Britain's position to secure political concessions. Moreover, despite the pessimistic prognostications of some officials, the ex-servicemen did not come to constitute a politically restless element in post-war African society. Thousands of Africans, many of whom had fought outside Africa, flooded back to Nyasaland during the years of demobilization from 1944 to 1946. For Kenya, Rosberg and Nottingham have argued that the wartime involvement and experiences of large numbers of Africans were of great importance in the development of post-war mass political activities.<sup>19</sup> In Nyasaland and a number of other African territories, the government was largely successful in re-introducing soldiers into their homes and families and the ex-serviceman did not become an important political factor.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, under the surface, many things were beginning to happen in Nyasaland during the 1940s which were to sharpen the conflict of black and white. There was, in the first place, a simmering African discontent in many areas provoked not only by such things as land shortage but also by government neglect of the rural areas. The formidable Congress indictment cited at the beginning of this chapter represented a growing mood of popular dissatisfaction with lack of welfare and social

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19. See, for example, Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of 'Mau Mau' (New York, 1966), pp. 191-5.

20. For a comparative study, containing some useful insights for the Nyasaland situation, see Eugene P. Schleh, "The Post-War Careers of Ex-Servicemen in Ghana and Uganda," Journal of Modern African Studies, 6,2 (1968), pp.203-220.

services. Personal experience by thousands of Africans, as migrant workers, of the contrast between their undeveloped country and those south of the Zambezi, together with the wartime experiences of large numbers outside Africa, was leading to mounting pressures on the government for greater services and opportunities. But of greater importance for the political emergence of the masses were a series of further factors which were to become prominent in the early 1950s. Yet, already, advocacy of schemes of amalgamation and talk of European settlement and further land alienation had aroused deep African fears and hostility, while the enforcement of unpopular agricultural legislation was leading to unrest in the rural areas. It was these various issues which were to create widespread African discontent by the early 1950s and which were to provide the opportunities for the development of a mass nationalist movement.

The subsequent rise of the rural masses was to give depth to the demands of Congress leaders, who were then beginning to challenge the legitimacy of the colonial state, and enable the national appeal to strike home along a broad front. By continuing to remain in existence, the N.A.C. ensured that the framework for national integration was available when the drive to acquire national power began.

#### The imposition of the Central African Federation

Federation was a key issue in uniting Africans as a whole in Nyasaland and providing the N.A.C. with a



significant cause to obtain a mass following. For years Africans in the Protectorate had been implacably opposed to any political ties with countries to the south. They distrusted partnership with the Europeans and disliked schemes of union which involved Southern Rhodesia. Chiefs, very few of whom had been supporters of the N.A.C. before 1949, now came to join with the new political leaders in presenting a united African front to attempts to form a federated Central Africa. Traditional authorities feared loss of power and prestige because of the direct rule policies which, they believed, were pursued in Southern Rhodesia. Together with the educated elements in Congress, they saw African hopes of eventual self-government and control of their affairs being threatened by white domination. Thousands of ordinary Africans, too, regarded federation with hostility. For over forty years, Nyasas had been migrating to Southern Rhodesia in search of work and as a result of the harsher treatment being meted out to Africans there had come to develop a greater regard for their own homeland. Experience of European-controlled territories south of the Zambezi had made Nyasas determined not to permit the extension of such settler-oriented situations to their own country with their resulting discriminations, insults and tensions. Between 1948 and 1953, the campaign for a Central African Union was resumed with greater determination by whites in the two Rhodesias and their supporters. Now the struggle was waged under the new banner of federation which many believed was the only possibility with any chance of

securing the backing of the British Government; the previous formula of amalgamation was not acceptable because it would not provide sufficient safeguards for African rights and interests. Africans also now intensified their opposition and joined the political battle.

Discussion of the events leading up to the formation of the Central African Federation readily available elsewhere,<sup>21</sup> still merits some detailed attention here.

"Under existing circumstances," which referred to the divergent native policies north and south of the Zambezi, the British Government had in 1944 concluded that amalgamation was not then "practicable."<sup>22</sup> Yet at the same time it had proposed the creation of an inter-territorial council to facilitate co-operation between the three Central African governments on matters of common concern without, of course, compromising the British Government's own special responsibilities in the two northern protectorates. The new Central African Council was an advisory body which did not involve the three territorial governments giving up any of their powers to it. Nonetheless, it proved quite successful in promoting co-operative programmes, ranging from agriculture to air services, and gave lie to the argument that

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21. R.I. Rotberg, op. cit., Chap.9; Colin Leys and Cranford Pratt, eds., A New Deal in Central Africa (London, 1960), Parts 1-2; and J. Gus Liebenow and Robert I. Rotberg, "Federalism in Rhodesia and Nyasaland," in W.S. Livingstone, ed., Federalism in the Commonwealth: A Bibliographical Commentary (London, 1963), pp.193-222.

22. Quoted in A.J. Hanna, The Story of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland (London, 1960), p.248.



political union was essential for closer and more effective economic and administrative development in the three territories. But despite a brief period of enthusiasm at the beginning, the white politicians of Southern Rhodesia remained dissatisfied with the Council. They were concerned about it becoming a substitute for amalgamation and only viewed it as a step in that direction.

The new post-war Labour Government in Britain, however, was adamant in its refusal to countenance outright amalgamation though it appears that it was not averse to any proposals for federation which might be forthcoming. It was willing to consider any system which provided the benefits of economic interdependence with the protection of African rights. By 1948, white settler politicians in the two Rhodesias had come to accept a federal solution as the more convenient though limited aim. Some more acceptable formula for closer association had to be found if white supremacy in Central Africa was to be maintained. The threat of advancing African nationalism in the continent and the existence of a British Government which was more amenable to nationalist demands, brought whites in Central Africa together to search for ways of maintaining their power and influence. Union with South Africa was not seriously considered because of that country's Afrikaner culture and control. But federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland was desirable, the more so on economic grounds. Southern Rhodesia was short of development funds which could be

obtained from the expanding Northern Rhodesian copper revenues while Nyasaland could provide the necessary labour which might otherwise be attracted to the Rand mines. On the other hand, Northern Rhodesia, with its still very small European population, saw closer political ties with its internally self-governing neighbour as a means of acquiring greater political control for its white settlers. Poor and undeveloped, Nyasaland was usually peripheral to any serious discussions of Central African unity. Nevertheless, white settlers in the Protectorate also held a deep distrust of the colonial policy of the Labour Government and on a number of occasions approved, in principle, the idea of federation and a "Greater African Dominion." Although some doubts were expressed about the immediate creation of a federal state, it seems that the racial and political reasons for joining with the Rhodesias were beginning to outweigh any initial economic disadvantages that Europeans in Nyasaland would suffer from such a wider union.<sup>23</sup>

In the Colonial Office, too, the need for some federal scheme for the three Central African territories was gaining ground in the late 1940s. A single large state could attract greater capital and more successfully implement the necessary development programmes without such heavy reliance on the British taxpayer. In late 1948, Roy Welensky (later Sir Roy), leading unofficial member in the Northern Rhodesia Legislative Council, and Sir

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23. The Nyasaland Times, 23 February 1948, p.4, and 28 April 1949, p.7.



Godfrey Huggins (later Lord Malvern), the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, were encouraged to take the initiative in producing a solution.<sup>24</sup>

The result was an unofficial conference of white leaders from the three territories held at Victoria Falls in early 1949. Agreement was reached upon a federal solution for the Rhodesias and Nyasaland which would, it was hoped, preserve white control but no detailed scheme was formulated.<sup>25</sup> Alarmed at the reports of the secret discussions at this conference, Africans in the two protectorates and those abroad commenced to ventilate their condemnation of any scheme which involved closer ties between their countries and Southern Rhodesia. For them amalgamation and federation were the same; both would subordinate their own interests to those of the white settlers. Federation, wrote Dr. Banda in a memorandum to the Colonial Office, was the "thin end of the wedge of amalgamation" - the "same old pill of amalgamation coated with the sugar of federation to make it easier for the Africans and the Imperial Government to swallow."<sup>26</sup> In Nyasaland itself, Congress leaders, chiefs and members of other groups also protested vociferously

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24. L.H. Gann, A History of Northern Rhodesia: Early Days to 1953 (London, 1964), p.404.

25. R.I. Rotberg, op. cit., pp.220-3, and the Nyasaland Times, 21 February 1949, p.1 for details of conference and views of Nyasaland's three white delegates.

26. Memorandum by Hastings K. Banda and Harry Nkumbula entitled Federation in Central Africa dated 1 May 1949. This was published privately as a booklet in February 1951.

against any political bonds with white-dominated Southern Rhodesia, reiterating their contention that Africans would thus be subject to new forms of indignity and disability and that federation was a device to perpetuate and rivet white control in Central Africa.

In spite of the intensification of African opposition, officials in Britain seem to have been more concerned about a threat by Southern Rhodesia in 1950 to leave the Central African Council if some decisive move was not made to forward federation. A new Labour Colonial Secretary, James Griffiths, called for a fresh examination of the federal question. An exploratory conference of civil servants of the four governments concerned met in London in 1951 and produced a report which agreed upon the need for some form of closer association of Central Africa. It was felt that a federation would prevent the spread of South African racial policies into the Rhodesias and also provide a rational foundation for greater economic development. More controversially, they minimized the differences in existing native policies of the three territories, concluding that whatever divergences still existed need no longer stand in the way of closer association. Provided, however, that adequate safeguards for African interests were devised, the officials thought that Africans might well come to realize the substantial advantages of federation.<sup>27</sup> At another Victoria Falls conference in September 1951, white settlers and government officials from the three territories met with

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27. See Cmd. 8233, 8234, and 8235 (1951).



African representatives and the Secretaries of State for the Colonies and the Commonwealth in an attempt to produce a workable federal scheme on the basis of the London conference recommendations. Perhaps for the first time, the British politicians were made clearly aware, both at this meeting and on their tours of the protectorates, of the extent and force of African opposition to federation. At the conference, agreement was arrived at on the principle of federation with the exception of the African representatives. But it was also evident that the Labour politicians now appreciated the overwhelming African concern and wished to ensure that African suspicions were allayed and African rights and interests securely protected before any federal scheme was adopted.<sup>28</sup>

The October 1951 general election in Britain altered the situation dramatically. The new Conservative Government announced its support for federation and declared that it was convinced that an urgent need existed for it. African hostility was acknowledged but it was felt that the advantages of federation would outweigh its possible disadvantages for Africans.<sup>29</sup> Despite continuing African protests, the British Government arranged for talks at Lancaster House in April 1952 to press ahead with closer association. Africans from the northern protectorates boycotted the conference. Nevertheless, a draft federal scheme was prepared; the British Government

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28. James Griffiths, Pages From Memory (London, 1969), pp. 112-119.

29. Cmd. 8411 (1951).

appeared determined to go ahead with federation.<sup>30</sup> African opposition in Central Africa grew more vociferous. Upto 1952, District Commissioners had been instructed to maintain an attitude of strict neutrality regarding the question of federation and to refrain from making any opinion as to its merits and disadvantages. Now, suddenly, administrative officers began freely offering their advice and urging Africans to accept federation. The Nyasaland Government published a pro-federation booklet in the vernacular languages and its information news-sheets carried articles stressing the economic benefits for Africans of a federated Central Africa. All this, however, made federation even more suspect among Africans. A delegation of chiefs from the three provinces toured Britain and attempted to petition the Queen. On the advice of the Conservative Government, the Queen declined to see them. Liberals in Britain also voiced their protest. But federation was virtually a fait accompli.

The Imperial Government viewed federation as a great opportunity to build a multi-racial state in Central Africa and believed that it would also promote rapid economic development in the area. It discounted African fears of white political control being consolidated on the grounds that African rights would be preserved. In the final scheme, safeguards for Africans were contained which ensured the maintenance of protectorate status in the northern territories, excluded matters

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30. Cmd. 8753 (1952).



directly affecting Africans from federal purview so that they remained a territorial responsibility, and established an African Affairs Board with certain powers to refer discriminatory legislation to the Secretary of State. The final inter-governmental meeting took place in London in January 1953. Once again Africans boycotted the talks.<sup>31</sup> In June, Parliament approved the federal scheme. Motions approving the scheme were also passed in the Legislative Councils of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and a predominantly white electorate accepted the proposals in a referendum in Southern Rhodesia. In September 1953, the Federal Constitution came into being.

#### Land and African discontent

The issue of federation touched a most sensitive fear on the part of Africans in Nyasaland - the fear of losing their land. It was fear that closer association would result in the loss of tribal land to Europeans - a view widely shared by Africans - that made this the most emotional reason for African opposition to federation. Thousands of Nyasas had lived and worked in Southern Rhodesia and knew that land alienation had gone much further there than in their own country. But this fear of large-scale land alienation not only alarmed Africans but exacerbated already deep African discontent regarding land in Nyasaland.

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31. Cmd. 8753 and 8754 (1953).

In his lengthy and important report on land matters in Nyasaland, Sir Sidney Abrahams stated in 1946 that the land issue was "more urgent today." The "problem" he declared, had been "intensified by very much greater pressure on the land" and had been "exposed in its seriousness by the failure of the Legislature to settle the differences between estate owners and resident natives." What was more, "native grievances in respect of land and the people on it are receiving form, direction and force from organized bodies comprised of the more intelligent members of their community." <sup>32</sup> Seven years later, serious riots broke out in several districts in the southern region over land and allied questions. Local Congress members were accused of "inciting and fomenting the disturbances," <sup>33</sup> which coincided with the imposition of the Federal Constitution. African land grievances were a fundamental source of mass discontent and provided the N.A.C. with a significant issue to acquire widespread support. It is therefore important to trace the development of these land grievances and to discuss the role of Congress in lending support to the agitated rural masses in order to understand the growth of a mass nationalist movement in Nyasaland during the 1950s. <sup>34</sup>

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32. Land Commission 1946, Vol.1, Report by Sir Sidney Abrahams (Zomba, 1947), p.7.

33. Annual Report of the Provincial Commissioners 1953 (Zomba, 1954), p.3.

34. For earlier accounts of land problems in Nyasaland, see Land Commission 1946, op. cit.; Philip Mason, "Land Policy" in Richard Gray, The Two Nations (London, 1960), pp.72-84; and B.S. Krishnamurthy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland 1891-1914, Ph.D. London, 1964, Epilogue, pp.343-353.



The Commission which enquired into the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 had noted that African land grievances had been one element behind the rebellion and it had recommended the taking of action by the government "to regulate the position of native tenants on European estates." But neither the Rising nor the wider public interest that was aroused in the land and allied labour questions appears to have had any important influence on the policy of the government.<sup>35</sup> Immediately after the 1914-18 War, a considerable number of European settlers entered the Protectorate attracted by the boom in prices of cotton and tobacco, and the number of planters was soon more than double what it had been at the end of the war. Whereas in March 1919 the amount of land held under Crown lease had been 13,753 acres, by March 1921 it had risen to 118,504 acres.<sup>36</sup> Further alienation of land to white settlers appeared likely when the 1921 Land Commission reported that there was a surplus of 2.7 million acres of land in the Protectorate of which 700,000 acres was considered suitable for European settlement even after providing for African needs for the next thirty years. Philanthropists were alarmed by these trends in policy. African anxiety over the question of their tenure was noted by the Ormsby-Gore Commission of 1925 which saw the

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35. George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African (Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 392-6.

36. Report of a Commission to Enquire into and Report upon Certain Matters connected with the Occupation of Land in the Nyasaland Protectorate, 10582 (Zomba, 1921), p. 24.

urgent need for a clear definition of African land rights.<sup>37</sup> But the 1921 Land Commission had been opposed to the creation of specific reserves for Africans. As a result, in the absence of any effective alternative arrangement, alienation of land to Europeans continued, creating greater insecurity and uneasiness in African minds. Governor Thomas may have claimed in 1930 that there was "little apprehension in the mind of the native as to his future security on his land," and reported that a number of areas had been proclaimed as set aside for African use;<sup>38</sup> but continuing alienation to Europeans combined with a governmental policy of ascertaining what land was available for alienation to non-Africans ensured that deep African fears remained in existence.

In 1933, to coincide with a new era of official indirect rule, it was decided that Native Authorities should be given a more direct interest in land. Based on the recommendations of the Ormsby-Gore Commission, a new policy was announced whereby land which had not yet been alienated would be vested in the Secretary of State, to be administered by the Governor subject to the former's approval, "for the use or common benefit, direct or indirect, of the natives of the Protectorate." But this new policy, embodied in the Nyasaland Protectorate (Native Trust Land) Order-in-Council of 1936, did not entail any

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37. Report of the East Africa Commission, Cmd. 2387 (1925), p.109.

38. C.O.525/138, No.33513, S.W. Thomas to C.O., 13 November 1930, P.R.O., London.



significant departure from previous land policy. The Governor, Sir Hubert Young, hoped to see the emergence of a "mixed state," where reserves on the basis of race were objectionable but where enough land would be held for the benefit of Africans without excluding alienation to European settlers. The procedure introduced was one which "while giving the natives a direct interest in the land ensures that they can neither dispose of it against their own interests nor stand in the way of it being disposed of to their own real advantage." The "development of the agricultural and mineral resources of the Protectorate by non-natives" Young declared, "is in the interest of the natives themselves," and it was therefore clear that alienation to Europeans would not be abandoned.<sup>39</sup>

The 1936 Order-in-Council offered no solution for the land shortage that had become acute in the Shire Highlands. By 1946, 87.25 per cent. of land in Nyasaland was Native Trust Land and only 5.1 per cent. was held in freehold, the remainder being forest reserves, townships and leasehold Crown land. Yet although the area of land held in freehold had thus been reduced from the original fifteen per cent. of the whole of the Protectorate,<sup>40</sup> a large number of Africans, approximately 200,000 or ten per cent. of the African population, still resided on these private estates which were predominantly based in the Shire Highlands, the most crowded part of Nyasaland.

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39. C.O.525/148, No.5342, H. Young to C.O., 3 February 1933, P.R.O., London.

40. This reduction was achieved through renunciations especially the three million acres in the North Nyasa district by the British South Africa Company in 1936.

And it was on these estates that conditions for African tenants were becoming intolerable.

As a result of recommendations of the Commission which enquired into the Chilembwe Rising and because of certain abuses brought to light by the investigation, an Ordinance was promulgated in 1917 which forbade European landholders from requiring labour instead of rent from Africans and laid down that they pay the wages of employees in cash and not in kind. But the landowners wanted labour and not rent. In practice, tenants were charged rent and their tenure depended upon their working for the landowner. If they failed to perform labour services they were ordered off the land. And as there was practically no Crown land in the Shire Highlands to which Africans could move, they were consequently forced to accede to the exactions of the landlord. The provisions of the 1917 Ordinance were ignored and the basic position of Africans on the estates remained as before.<sup>41</sup> The situation was made even worse after the first World War with the advent of more white settlers. Private estates were divided up and transferred to new settlers by existing owners. The calls on tenants for labour therefore became heavier and often six months work was demanded during the year. The new white landlords also did not always wish to retain people on their newly-acquired land and Africans were either moved elsewhere onto the estate or evicted. According to Governor Bowring in 1924, this new situation

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41. Land in the Nyasaland Protectorate (1921), op. cit., pp.13-14.



had led to "the creation of a homeless, wandering and disaffected class" as a result of their being evicted from private estates either for refusing to render the required labour services to landholders or for being resident on land which was now being developed.<sup>42</sup> Three years later, the Acting Governor reported "A feeling of insecurity which had rarely existed formerly, became fairly general"<sup>43</sup> and Bowring also had recorded "that the insecurity of tenure to which they are subjected is keenly felt by the natives concerned and I fear that it is a position which is liable to cause trouble if it is allowed to drift."

In the meantime, the rapid growth in population, the result of both natural increase and large Lomwe immigration, added considerably to the congestion in the Shire Highlands. By 1945 the Lomwe were estimated to number 373,000 while the total population of the whole southern region was 916,000. In the Mlanje and Cholo districts, where most of the Lomwe were concentrated, they numbered 230,000 out of a total of 329,000. The density of population of the Shire Highlands had by 1945 increased to over 150 to the square mile. The Cholo district, of which two-thirds was included in private estates, had the highest density with 192 to the square mile. As population pressure became greater, the landholders became

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42. C.O.525/107, Bowring to C.O., 14 May 1924, P.R.O., London. See also NSE 2/1/1, Annual reports on Cholo district for years 1923-5, M.N.A., Zomba.

43. C.O.525/119, Rankine to C.O., 28 February 1927, enclosure memorandum on natives on private estates in Nyasaland, P.R.O., London.

increasingly more assertive in the protection of their property rights. Some of the ways in which they asserted themselves conflicted with African customs. A son was not allowed to remain with his family when he came of age unless he had the permission of the landholder. In a matrilineal and matrilocal society, a husband was often not allowed to settle in his wife's village. The treatment of tenants also continued to be harsh on many estates and Abrahams reported that "there is a strong feeling of injustice felt among resident natives." <sup>44</sup>

As we have suggested, the question of his rights to the land assumed paramount importance in the mind of Africans. In his desire for a settlement, he was supported to some extent by missionaries and philanthropists abroad. The government, too, was aware of the problem and in 1920 it had appointed a commission to investigate and make recommendations. The commission recognized that it was essential to establish security of tenure. "We think that...every native tenant accepted by a landowner...should be deemed to have been accepted as a tenant for a definite period of 4 years, subject to the performance of the terms of the agreement of tenancy." On the expiry of a tenancy, it proposed that it should be made law that only a limited proportion of the tenants on an estate could be evicted at one time. It also proposed that the period of labour which the tenant should perform

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44. Land Commission 1946, Vol.1, pp.15-16 for details of African grievances. See also Land Commission Evidence, Vol.2, for the evidence of E.C. Barnes, Acting Labour Commissioner, dated 13 September 1946.



be prescribed and recommended a maximum period of two months during a specified season of the year.<sup>45</sup> But nothing came of these and other recommendations of the commission. In spite of the urgency of the matter, the whole problem was left in abeyance until it was re-opened by the Ormsby-Gore Commission.<sup>46</sup> Presumably as a result of its criticisms, the whole question of the position of Africans on private estates was reconsidered during 1926 and 1927, and in the following year another ordinance was enacted to settle this matter once and for all. Under this new ordinance, rent was fixed at not less than the equivalent of two months' and at not more than that of three months' average pay of agricultural workers. The landholder was required to provide facilities for tenants to work or grow economic crops in lieu of rent, and, if he did not, he lost his claim to rent. Further, the landholder was only allowed to evict one-tenth of his tenants after every five years after giving six months' prior notice.

At the end of every five years, the situation became tense but nothing serious happened until 1943. During the period of depression there were few evictions but when agricultural prices rose during the second World War estate owners were anxious to develop their lands and

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45. Land in the Nyasaland Protectorate (1921), op. cit., pp.15-16.

46. Report of the East Africa Commission, op. cit., p.109.

in 1943 large numbers of Africans were served with notices to quit.<sup>47</sup> "Severe incidents" occurred on certain estates in the Blantyre area owing to several hundreds of Africans refusing to move. Two years later, in 1945, there resulted "an awkward situation" in the Cholo district when two landowners attempted to evict a considerable number of Africans on the ground that they had not paid rent for some years. Around 1,250 Africans were involved and their resettlement on Native Trust Land would have proved difficult for the government. Eventually, the District Commissioner managed to reduce the numbers to be evicted to about one hundred and twenty. But his efforts disclosed a series of serious grievances felt by Africans residing on the estates, some of which we have already noted. Some tenants complained of having to pay rent when the government did not charge rent on Native Trust Land. Others criticized estate owners for having reduced the size of their gardens and for not allowing their children to build huts and open up gardens. Further points of discontent focussed on the owners not permitting resident Africans to possess cattle or to cut down timber for the purposes of firewood and hut construction.<sup>48</sup>

The only solution, as both the Ormsby-Gore and Abrahams Commissions had suggested, was that land should be bought back from European landholders for the resettlement of Africans. The 1947 Planning Committee declared that this was not a practicable proposition and

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47. Lord Hailey, An African Survey (rev.ed., London, 1957), p.711.

48. Land Commission 1946, Vol.1, op. cit., pp.14-16.



it was only after 1954 that more effective steps were taken to re-acquire land. Before then, African fears of further land alienation were aroused when the European Convention of Associations publicized its post-war schemes for the settlement of white soldiers on undeveloped land. The settler body was of the "opinion that Nyasaland needs more British settlers of the right type," a view that was supported by the Planning Committee which believed that the economic development of the Protectorate was dependent upon the introduction of white planters.<sup>49</sup> Sir Sidney Abrahams wrote vividly of African fears at the time. Such schemes of European settlement had led to "antagonism in the districts of the Southern Province where the natives, feeling land hunger sharpened by resentment at the existence of large private holdings of undeveloped land, and aggravated by the addition of the grievances of the resident natives, might fear that they would lose still more land."<sup>50</sup> But the government did nothing to allay African fears about alienation or seek to ameliorate their various grievances regarding conditions on white estates.

African discontent over the land question was constantly voiced by the N.A.C. from the mid-1940s. Further European settlement was opposed and demands made to have all undeveloped lands revert to Native Trust Land.

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49. Land Commission Evidence, Vol.2, op. cit., Memorandum on European settlement in Nyasaland by the Convention of Associations. See also Report of the Planning Committee (Zomba, 1948).

50. Land Commission 1946, Vol.1, op. cit., p.31.

Calls were made to ensure that landlords accepted rents in cash or produce rather than through work, and condemnation was heaped upon planters for burning the huts of Africans, for not permitting tenants to own livestock, and for forcing elderly people and widows to pay rent.<sup>51</sup> Congress agitation mounted when Europeans resumed the campaign for federation. Congress articulated African opposition to any closer association with Southern Rhodesia on grounds that Africans feared further land alienation. African discontent was also aggravated by the 1952 Ordinance which replaced that of 1928. In 1953 the Cholo riots erupted and, at last, government realized the extreme seriousness of the African land situation in the Shire Highlands.

Abrahams had aptly described the Cholo district as "one of the storm centres where resident natives are to be found."<sup>52</sup> For years, District Commissioners had been commenting on the uneasy situation prevailing in the district and reporting on the constant friction between European landholders and their African tenants.<sup>53</sup> In 1952, it was acknowledged that the discussions on federation had "added to the uneasiness of the African population and increased the instability of the Native Administration" in the district. "This resulted in a general lack of discipline." A number of "incidents" occurred on the

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51. See, for example, N.A.C. to Abrahams, 10 August 1946, in Land Commission Evidence, Vol.2, op. cit.,

52. Land Commission 1946, Vol.1, op. cit., p.20.

53. See Annual Reports of Cholo District in NSE 2/1/1-8 and also file NSE 1/8 for details, M.N.A., Zomba.



British Central Africa Company's estate in December "partly due to the increased rent" payable under the new 1952 Ordinance. From the middle of 1953, with federation having been virtually approved, "the tension increased." Taxes came in very slowly and people increasingly refused to pay various kinds of fees and to attend native courts. Unauthorized cultivation and cutting of trees also commenced on a number of white estates in the district.<sup>54</sup>

Local Congress leaders were involved in attempting to promote civil disobedience in the district which manifested itself initially in a very successful African boycott of the coronation celebrations. This was followed by a campaign against payment of taxes and an attempt to assert land rights by widespread trespass on private estates.<sup>55</sup> In August 1953, an unfortunate incident occurred which brought matters to a head. Two Africans were caught stealing oranges on the Tennett estate at Luchenza. Their cries for help brought neighbouring villagers to the scene and their European captors, fearing trouble, hurriedly released the two prisoners and fled. In the meantime, another European who had gone to fetch a car, arrived on the scene, picked up the sacks of oranges, loaded them into the car and drove off. The villagers thought that the objects being lifted into the car were human bodies and that the Africans had been killed and taken away for European consumption. Rumour spread that

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54. Report of a Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Governor on the 20th. August 1953 (Zomba, 1953), p.3.

55. For details, see Arthur Westrop, Green Gold (Bulawayo, n.d.), pp.342-345.

two Africans had been killed by the sons of Tennett, who was intensely disliked by many of his tenants on account of his harshness and eviction of Africans of long-standing. Associated with this was the African notion of Chifwamba or man-stealing.<sup>56</sup> Nearly one thousand Africans converged on the Tennett estate armed with spears, sticks and stones and the evergrowing crowd smashed windows and cut telephone wires. Police reinforcements eventually managed to disperse the crowd but only after serious clashes in which one African was accidentally killed.<sup>57</sup>

For the next week, small groups of Africans, probably local Congress supporters, moved about the Cholo district attempting to create an atmosphere of disorder. Labourers on private estates were urged to go on short strikes; trees were felled across roads; telephone wires were cut; and the court houses of moderate chiefs burnt down. Congress-directed raiders further attacked the Seventh-day Adventist station at Malamulo, fired its gates, drove all the servants away and terrified the white staff. A few plantations were also molested, pumping and lighting plant being wrecked on one estate and tea plants and trees being cut down on others.<sup>58</sup> Police reinforcements were brought in from neighbouring territories but they saw little service in the district. The

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56. ibid., pp.349-350. For a further discussion of the notion of cannibalism and man-stealing in Nyasaland, see G. Shepperson and T. Price, Independent African, op. cit., pp.9-11.

57. Report of Commission of Inquiry 1953, op. cit., passim.

58. A. Westrop, op. cit., pp.359-361.



disorders gradually subsided in Cholo but spread to neighbouring districts and will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

From 1954, the government began the policy of acquiring land from the European landholders. By 1960 the amount of freehold land had been reduced to 750,000 acres which was just over three per cent. of the total area of the Protectorate. In 1946 the number of families resident on private estates had been nearly fifty thousand; by 1959 this figure had been reduced to 16,500.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, high rents, evictions and other grievances and restrictions continued for many tenants and their case was widely advertised by Congress during the 1950s in its attempts to secure popular support for a movement striving to achieve independence which, it was suggested, would provide a permanent and favourable solution to the problem of African land rights in the Shire Highlands. Nor had anything been done to improve the position of Africans living on private estates in the central region who in 1946 numbered about 10,000 families. In many ways, their position was even more insecure than tenants in the south. They made an annual contract with the landholder who provided them with seed and other forms of assistance to enable them to grow tobacco which he then sold on their behalf, taking an agreed share of the proceeds. But if the landlord refused to enter into a new contract, the tenants were obliged to leave the estate at the end of

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59. A.J. Hanna, op. cit., pp.212-213.

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59. A.J. Hanna, op. cit., pp.212-213.



the year. To be sure, Nyasaland's land problem was eased during the 1950s but it had by no means been solved. At the same time, government interference with African methods of land usage was leading to further unrest and outbursts of resistance in the rural areas.

#### Enforced agrarian change and rural disaffection

Increased interference by the colonial authorities in African methods of farming, through the introduction of a series of agricultural laws which were rigorously imposed from the late 1940s, gave rise to considerable indigenous unrest in the Protectorate. For the first time, government was stipulating the manner in which the rural cultivator should conduct his daily business and this intervention created intense and widespread dissatisfaction. Already traditional farmers openly defied unpopular agricultural rules and the resulting fines and punishments added fuel to the fire of resentment and protest being kindled in the souls of many Africans by the imposition of federation and the existence of intolerable conditions on white estates in the Shire Highlands and elsewhere.

During the period of the great depression of 1929, the price of most tropical commodities in Nyasaland had slumped drastically. The government concluded that African production had to be increased if incomes were to be maintained and prosperity promoted.<sup>60</sup> With the passing

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60. Ns 1/2/2, Circular No.15 of 1934 dated 6 June 1934 entitled "Production of Native Economic Crops." See also Hall to C.O., 12 June 1934, M.N.A., Zomba.

of the years, however, the problem of increased production came to be overshadowed by another problem of still greater and more permanent import. It was realized, during the 1930s, that the growing of more crops was threatening to exhaust the land. Attention had been drawn to the menace of soil erosion as early as the 1920s but it was only in the next decade that the magnitude of the danger was revealed. African farmers occupying the large bulk of the land of the Protectorate and multiplying at a rate that doubled the population every twenty-five years, posed the major problem of soil erosion. The vast majority of Africans were still essentially subsistence cultivators whose agricultural practices remained very backward. Cultivation continued to be of the shifting, slash-and-burn type; systematic rotation of crops and the application of manure scarcely existed. It was this combination of a rapidly rising population and increasing cultivation in inefficient ways that had led to soil erosion becoming a serious problem in Nyasaland.<sup>61</sup>

Tentative attempts were made before the second World War to tackle soil erosion in parts of the southern region and in the highland areas of Dedza and Ncheu.<sup>62</sup> But in view of the small field staff of the government's

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61. C.C. Wrigley, "Kenya: The Patterns of Economic Life 1902-45," in Vincent Harlow et al, eds., History of East Africa (Oxford, 1965), Vol.2, pp.251-9; R.W. Kettlewell, "Agricultural Change in Nyasaland: 1945-1960," Food Research Institute Studies of Tropical Food and Agriculture, 5,3 (1965), pp.237-240; Report of the Agricultural Survey of the five most Northerly Districts of Nyasaland (Zomba, 1938), especially Part 17; and An Outline of Agrarian Problems and Policy in Nyasaland (Zomba, 1955), pp.1-2.

62. NS1/2/3, P. Topham, Soil Erosion Officer, to S.P.C., 15 August 1937, M.N.A., Zomba.



agricultural department, little was achieved.<sup>63</sup> The 1939-1945 War itself severely handicapped efforts to deal with the various agrarian problems. Indeed, wartime emphases on internal self-sufficiency of food requirements and on the increase of export crops needed for Britain's war effort led to severe soil deterioration in many areas by 1945. With an acute shortage of the necessary staff who could provide adequate supervision of agricultural developments, soil erosion was accelerated by increasing production. The problem was further aggravated by postwar imperial policy which sought to expand production in the colonial territories to enable Britain, facing acute food-shortages, to tackle the tasks of reconstruction. Shortages of personnel and equipment meant that soil erosion was speeded up even more by continuing efforts to boost agrarian productivity.

The late 1940s therefore saw the urgent application of rules for soil conservation and land usage as well as the recruitment of a larger establishment to check the advance of soil deterioration.<sup>64</sup> A Natural Resources Ordinance was enacted in 1946. This was replaced by a new instrument in 1949 which was supplemented in 1952 by further rules which gave the government wider powers of enforcement. Initial emphasis, both before and immediately after the war, was placed on introducing contour ridge cultivation and tie-ridges which made good progress in

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63. Lord Hailey, An African Survey, op. cit., pp.1033-35.

64. Report of the Post-War Development Committee (Zomba, 1946), p.7.

many districts. But they had important limitations and had to be replaced by other measures such as contour bunds which were not so popular. With the advent of Sir Geoffrey Colby as Governor of Nyasaland in 1948, there began a more intensive phase of enforcing protective measures. From this time on, a regimen of rules, regulations and restrictions required African villagers to do this and not do that. Farmers had to construct contour bunds, plant at certain times and clear and pull out old crops by certain dates after harvest. They had also to refrain from cultivating on steep hillsides and river banks and abstain from cutting trees without a permit. By the time Colby left the Protectorate in 1956, gross erosion had been halted. It was, however, according to the Director of Agriculture of the time, "won hardly and at the price of much misunderstanding and unpopularity."<sup>65</sup> Opposition to agricultural rules "had become a powerful focus for African nationalist sympathies. Everyone, being a cultivator, could be relied upon to support it, and obstruction of government agricultural policy became one of the chief planks of nationalist campaigning."<sup>66</sup>

To persuade peasants to change their methods of cultivation is, the world over, a usually slow and difficult process. Such was the urgency of the problem of soil erosion in Nyasaland, however, that insufficient time was allowed for experiment and demonstration. It was not surprising, therefore, that already conservative

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65. R.W. Kettlewell, op. cit., p.257.

66. ibid., p.240.



African farmers were reluctant to forsake a proven system for others which were less certain. Traditional methods embodied the inherited wisdom of the past and the new agricultural experts in the Protectorate were not as yet fully equipped with the detailed knowledge that was relevant to different local conditions. Occasionally, the new regulations, though fundamentally sound, had unfortunate consequences. Their enforcement led sometimes to lower yields which would deter many from implementing them again. The Tonga and the Upper Shire Yao found other reasons for opposing contour ridging, one because of fear that waterlogging would cause cassava tubers to rot and the other because it encouraged white ants in the gardens.<sup>67</sup> The conservatism and stubbornness of African farmers was aggravated by the compulsory nature of the new measures. The urgency of the agrarian problem had led the government to conclude that an element of coercion was necessary and justified for the common good. Accordingly, anyone failing to comply with soil-conserving methods of land use was liable to fines or imprisonment or even uprooting of his crops. The various rules were often harshly and clumsily imposed and punishment served only to increase African resentment.

African resentment was further based on the extra work involved in carrying out the measures and also on the need to adopt them during a traditional period of

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67. ibid., p.256, and J. Clyde Mitchell, "The Political Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland," African Studies, 8,3 (1949), p.159.

relaxation between harvesting one crop and planting the next. Contour ridges and tie-ridges involved little extra work and their advantages were easily perceived. But bunds were "less easily understood...and less acceptable to traditional cultivators." They were "an innovation necessitating additional work" to the extent of anything from a fortnight to a month, and were "unquestionably arduous for the small African farmer equipped only with hand tools." The situation was made even worse by the fact that most of the work of construction had to be done during the dry season which was not only the traditional period of rest but the time of the year when the ground was very hard.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, in the majority of cases, the fragmentation of land holdings over a wide area made the work of constructing bunds and of keeping them in good repair much heavier than if the land was in one compact block.<sup>69</sup> And in a country where such large numbers of adult able-bodied males were absent in neighbouring countries, much of the burden of work fell upon the womenfolk and created many new and severe problems.

Many other African objections to the new agrarian changes may be cited. Generally, however, it was the coercion and compulsion that was opposed being especially detested as European farmers were given advice and not forced to comply with the new laws.<sup>70</sup> Close European

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68. R.W. Kettlewell, op. cit., pp.240, 256.

69. T.D. Thomson, "Soil Conservation - Some Implications," Journal of African Administration, 5,2 (1953), p.67.

70. W.K.M. Chiume, Nyasaland Demands Secession and Independence (London, 1959), pp.17-18.



supervision of African agriculture and consequent control of the African's daily life was another source of criticism. Indeed, to many Africans the agricultural regulations symbolized the gradual encroachment of Europeans on their land. Behind much of their opposition was this further fear for their land. African fears about the security of their land rights led them to disregard and defy agricultural regulations in order to demonstrate their intention to resist any further European encroachments. "To a suspicion-ridden people" wrote an experienced government official, "it is obviously a preparation, at their expense, for their land to be taken over by foreigners."<sup>71</sup> As disturbing as the agricultural rules themselves was the environment in which they were introduced. Development entailed a large increase in European technical personnel in the rural areas at a time when the Convention of Associations was advocating further European settlement and the scheme for federation was being imposed. African reactions to the postwar agricultural laws have to be related to their deeper fears of increasing European encroachment on their land.

With the coming of federation, African fears regarding their land were heightened and expressed themselves in more widespread opposition to agricultural regulations. During the late 1940s, Congress branches had shown "open hostility" to the government's bunding

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71. T.D. Thomson, Domasi Community Development Scheme 1949-1954 (Zomba, 1954), p.12.

campaigns.<sup>72</sup> Now, local Congress leaders were directly involved in promoting disturbances though the many outbursts lacked any central direction and co-ordination. Chiefs in the Cholo, Port Herald, Chikwawa and Chiradzulu districts were molested for enforcing agricultural rules while at Domasi, in late 1953, two hundred armed Africans attempted to prevent the local District Commissioner from taking a village headman to court for disobeying farming laws. The police were stoned and the crowd fired upon, two Africans being killed in the clash.<sup>73</sup> Chief Gomani of Ncheu, the paramount of the southern Ngoni, provided the most dramatic incident of African transgression of the unpopular laws. For a number of years, Gomani had been recognized as an energetic promoter of better agrarian and animal husbandry practices. Now, however, to demonstrate his rejection of the despised federation, he instructed his people to disregard all agricultural, forestry and veterinary laws and also refuse to pay taxes. Gomani was arrested and deposed but not before a series of riots had been precipitated requiring police action.<sup>74</sup> "Troubles on agricultural rules" also broke out in

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72. See, for example, Annual Report of the Provincial Commissioners for 1948 (Zomba, 1949), p.4.

73. The Nyasaland Times, 5 October 1953, p.2 for a summary report of the various disturbances.

74. Michael Scott, A Time to Speak (London, 1958), pp.282-4. See also R.H. Keppel-Compton to L.B. Greaves, 18 November 1959 with enclosure entitled "A factual account of the events leading up to and immediately following the deposing of Philip Gomani as Chief in the Ncheu District of Nyasaland in 1953," dated 17 November 1959 in Mss.Afr.s.864, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.



Nkhota-Khota in 1953 and 1954. According to the African nationalist journal, Tsopano, these troubles "existed all along the lakeshore up to Nkata Bay and led to the withdrawal of the Agricultural staff to other areas."<sup>75</sup> Such were the disturbances in all of these areas that the government admitted that "Native Administration in large parts of these Districts virtually ceased."<sup>76</sup> Greater governmental involvement with the rural African's daily life, his land and his agricultural practices had created a broad undercurrent of resentment and discontent which gave a marked impetus to nationalist politics.

#### Congress and mass political mobilization

In 1950, the activities of the central Congress body were transferred from Blantyre to the town of Lilongwe in the central region. This was the centre of the growing peasant tobacco farming industry and the new Congress President, J.R.N. Chinyama, was also chairman of the African Farmers' Association. Apart from Sangala, who was now Vice-President, and a Tonga, A.J.M. Banda, the new Congress executive was composed of persons from the central region who had not been prominent in the previous African political action. Some of them, like Chinyama, had been members of the short-lived Central Province Native Association while others may have participated with Levi Mumba in the Lilongwe African Welfare Society which he had

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75. Tsopano, 5 (1960), p.13. See also Annual Report on Native Administration 1954 (Zomba, 1955), p.18.

76. Annual Report of the Provincial Commissioners for 1953 (Zomba, 1954), p.3.

started during the late 1930s. Thus some connexions existed with the previous political leaderships and many of the new central N.A.C. leaders were probably the products of the two Scottish missions. But they came from different occupational sectors than those African leaders of the inter-war and early post-war years, with businessmen, traders and prosperous peasant farmers taking the place of the civil servants and clerks. It would appear that after the Matinga crisis the government had sternly enjoined participation by all African civil servants in any but the most innocuous organizations. Congress leadership was now assumed by retired persons like Sangala or independent African businessmen and farmers working and coming mainly from the hitherto politically acquiescent central region.<sup>77</sup> But the African clerks and school-teachers remained, now in the background, as advisers of the new Congress leaders and local branch officials. Among these civil servants was a newer generation of better-educated Africans. Two of them, O.E. Chirwa and W.M. Chirwa, both of whom were Tonga, were university graduates and they played fairly influential roles behind the scenes.<sup>78</sup>

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77. 27a/111, Minutes of executive committee meeting of the N.A.C., 8-9 April 1950 and minutes of annual conference of the N.A.C., 5-7 August 1950, M.N.A., Zomba. The following were elected new office-bearers: J.R.N. Chinyama (Lilongwe) as President-General; J.F. Sangala (Blantyre) as Vice-President General; A.J.M. Banda (Nkhata Bay) as Secretary-General; K. Yobe Nyaka (Lilongwe) as Treasurer-General; J.E. Mjojo and W.R. Moses (both of Lilongwe) as assistant secretary-generals; and B.A. Corner (Lilongwe) as assistant treasurer-general.

78. Interviews with Mr. J.R.N. Chinyama, Lilongwe, Malawi.



Congress, however, remained loosely organized and still had no full-time political organizers possessing a singular vocational commitment to politics as a way of life. The N.A.C. also continued to lack a precise programme of action towards a long-term objective and it was mainly concerned with bringing African grievances to the attention of the government for redress. Emphasis was still on economic and social injustices and, although "direct representation of the African Congress in all public bodies" was called for, it had barely begun to formulate its ideas for political transformation. The demand for self-government was not yet explicit and the N.A.C. leaders were more suppliants than revolutionaries. Paid-up membership had also fallen off during the post-Matinga interlude and the movement lent itself to the criticism of not being broadly-based and of enjoying the confidence of a decisive majority of the African population. But the revived Congress was fortunate in being provided with an almost immediate stimulus to growth in the form of the moves towards a Central African Federation.

The federation proposals greatly stimulated African political activity. Congress and the chiefs were brought together for joint political action; mass meetings were organized to voice the overwhelming African opposition to closer association with Southern Rhodesia; and officials appointed to collect funds throughout the country to send delegations of chiefs and Congress spokesmen to England to present their views directly to the British Government. In April 1953, a meeting was held

at which the N.A.C. leaders, Native Authorities and others openly resolved to meet the imposition of any federal scheme by "the strongest non-violent resistance." They threatened a national withdrawal of African labour, the non-payment of taxes and the boycott of district, provincial and other councils. A Nyasaland Supreme Council was set up which included a number of chiefs to direct the campaign against federation.<sup>79</sup>

But the articulation of African opposition to federation was one thing; giving force to that viewpoint through effective action was something else. Up to August 1953, there appeared to be some possibility that Congress and the chiefs could work together and implement their various proposals for non-co-operation. Fifteen Native Authorities handed in their resignations and others encouraged defiance of government regulations. Congress leaders successfully urged Africans to boycott the coronation celebrations in many districts and were also involved in the organization of a few minor strikes. But the outbreak of the Cholo disturbances and the spreading of dissension to other parts of the southern region brought non-co-operation to an end. The Cholo type of rural radicalism was anathema to the central body of Congress. Indeed, the disorders may well have frightened the central leadership. Government accusations that Congress had inspired the disturbances by its declared programme of non-co-operation, brought fear to an

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79. The Nyasaland Times, 9 April 1953, p.1.



essentially moderate leadership especially when it was threatened with imprisonment and restriction. Already a few Africans had been detained for sedition and for attempting to undermine the lawful authority of Native Authorities.<sup>80</sup> The outcome was that the Congress executive under J.R.N. Chinyama rejected violence and abandoned its campaign against federation.<sup>81</sup> This was followed by a similar decision of the chiefs and ten of them were persuaded to withdraw their resignations as Native Authorities.

Nevertheless, considerable bitterness was felt by at least African intellectuals at this time.<sup>82</sup> A number of them now commenced to call into question the very legitimacy of the colonial system. They felt that the colonial government did not represent or heed the views of Africans and that only through they themselves gaining control over their own affairs would their needs and demands be effectively realized. Congress, too, had begun to voice the new demand of eventual self-government and now asked for immediate equal representation of Africans with Europeans on the Legislative Council. But despite this growing militant trend, J.F. Sangala, President of the N.A.C. from 1954 to the end of 1956, stressed that Africans hoped to achieve their objectives by following proper constitutional channels.

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80. ibid., 24 August 1953, p.7.

81. ibid., 17 September 1953, p.9.

82. See John Gunther, Inside Africa (London, 1956), pp. 605-6.

Of greater immediate importance was the reluctance of the central Congress leadership to turn their movement into a mass-based organization. Despite mounting unrest in the rural areas, Congress leaders had hardly begun peering at the possibility of lending leadership to the agitated rural populace. It seems that the Congress executive continued to make no attempt to recruit at a popular level during the years 1954 and 1955. This may be because Congress headquarters was, after the southern region disturbances, more concerned with securing control of the existing branch organization rather than seeking mass support. Mass involvement at that time may have provoked disorder in the countryside which was the last thing that a moderate leadership wanted to see. But central Congress leaders were in no position to control effectively the various branches which despite central pressures continued to act independently and increasingly radically. Mounting mass unrest was leading Congress branches to become involved in mass action and, at the grass roots level, it is clear that from 1954 there was a growing expansion of the political movement. The framework for a popular political movement in Nyasaland already existed and it was now to be gradually filled out and energized by the local branches with local support. The popular appeal of the N.A.C. between 1954 and 1956 depended almost entirely on local initiative.

The 'mass factor' in African political change is one of the most neglected features of the study of



African colonial politics. Research on how the local communities entered into a form of modern political organization and activity in colonial Malawi has hardly begun and what follows is necessarily conjectural being based on a few interviews with Congress branch officials and also on ideas derived from literature on other African territories.<sup>83</sup>

Malawi is a poor country. Throughout the colonial era, the vast bulk of the population remained subsistence cultivators growing maize, millet, cassava and some rice. It is true that two important cash crops were developed: tobacco in the central region (and in the Shire Highlands to some extent) and cotton in the Lower Shire Valley. African villagers grew one of these crops but the amount per grower was always very small. A few 'master farmers' grew more and received larger incomes but rarely was more than £10-15 per annum received by the majority of the population through such cultivation. Cash cropping did not therefore lead to the development of a wealthy class in Nyasaland and the range of economic differentiation among those dependant upon cultivation for their livelihood was limited. Nevertheless, a limited socio-economic

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83. For some studies on the role of the masses as a political factor in colonial Africa, see Martin Kilson, Political Change in a West African State (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), pp.117-123, 179-192, 284-6; and J.M. Lonsdale, "Rural Resistance and Mass Political Mobilization amongst the Luo of Western Kenya," East African Academy paper 1965. For an analytical discussion, see John S. Saul, "Africa," in Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., Populism (London, 1969), pp.122-150. The most useful comparative study for Nyasaland appears to me to be G. Andrew Maguire, Toward 'Uhuru' in Tanzania (Cambridge, 1969). I have relied heavily on some of its insights for the discussion in the following paragraphs.

differentiation did take place within rural society and a petty bourgeoisie emerged composed of poorly-paid teachers, clerks in Native Administration, the more prosperous farmers, traders, hawkers and some contractors.<sup>84</sup> During the pre-1953 period, some of these groups such as those of school-teachers, clerks and ministers of religion had participated in the modern-style politics of the Native Associations and the Congress branches in the rural areas. Now, during the 1950s, it was not so much the teachers and clerks who organized the Congress branches - both were subject to dismissal for involvement in political activity - as African traders and farmers.

It was the rural petty bourgeoisie which lent the frustrated and agitated masses a more literate and articulate leadership and which linked populist forces organizationally with the central organization of Congress. Many of these local politicians had been active in the local Congress branches and they now began representing the grievances of the ordinary Africans and recruiting them into the Congress movement. A network of contacts was developed between the Congress branch headquarters in the district and the countryside. The intermediaries who kept political activity going at the grass roots level once the branch headquarters had made the initial contacts in outlying areas were probably a low

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84. For some comments on African tobacco farming in Malawi and socio-economic differentiation in rural society, see Edwin Dean, The Supply Responses of African Farmers (Amsterdam, 1966).



level teacher and clerk acting secretly, a local trader who travelled occasionally to the district boma and others who had more than local exposure and interests. Local Congress leaders therefore became the spokesmen for the peasantry and for all those aggrieved by the chiefs in other ways.<sup>85</sup>

The rural bourgeoisie could not have performed this role if the traditional authorities had remained the effective guardians of African rights and the main spokesmen for their interests. The role of the Native Authorities as mere agents of the central government had become progressively more evident as the colonial authority expanded its efforts to modernize the rural economy. The Native Authorities' role in enforcing unpopular measures such as the various regulations governing soil erosion, stock improvement and disease control worked to discredit them; complaints against regulations went hand-in-hand with criticisms of the chiefs. There was a deepening alienation of the masses from their chiefs. Furthermore, enterprising Africans such as clerks, teachers, farmers, traders, etc., found little opportunity to promote their own interests and express their own ideas and initiatives within the existing local government system. Even when the executive functions of the Native Authorities were transferred to elected District Councils in many districts from 1954, enterprising Africans continued to remain dissatisfied with the role

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85. See R.L. Wishlade, "Chiefship and Politics in the Mlanje District of Southern Nyasaland," Africa, 31,1 (1961), pp.36-45.

they could play in the councils.<sup>86</sup> The role of the central government in local affairs was still strong. A disen-  
chanted middle level local elite therefore joined with  
the ordinary Africans to achieve their objects through  
Congress. African interests could not be served within  
the local government system with its impotent Native  
Authorities and its strong central government control and  
direction; their case could only be promoted by a  
political body such as Congress.

By April 1957, 60,000 Africans were said to hold  
Congress cards and the movement was expanding. The  
profound frustration and resentment at the level of the  
mass consequent upon the enforcement of unpopular agrarian  
laws and the imposition of federation, is perhaps the key  
to understanding the astounding politicization of a large  
part of the countryside in so brief a period of time.  
Although there appear to have been virtually no 'incidents'  
between 1954 and 1958, there was clearly a broad under-  
current of discontent and many thousands of Africans were  
fined or imprisoned during this period for disobeying  
farming laws. Agricultural regulations could only be  
enforced under the threat of force. In 1958, colonial

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86. In line with postwar British colonial policy, local  
government bodies were given more democratic form. See  
African Studies Branch (Colonial Office), "A Survey of  
the Development of Local Government in the African  
Territories since 1947, 1. Nyasaland," Journal of  
African Administration, 4,1 (1952), supplement, pp.1-6.  
See also R.S. Hudson, Report on Development of Local  
Government in Nyasaland (London, 1951), p.3. For the  
new District Councils, see H.G. Graham-Jolly, "The  
Progress of Local Government in Nyasaland," Journal of  
African Administration, 7,4 (1955), pp.188-192 and  
R.W. Robins, "Development of Rural Local Government  
for Nyasaland," Journal of African Administration, 13  
(1961), pp.148-153.



administration broke down in many areas when villagers increasingly violated the rules and it became evident that colonial rule could not be maintained much longer without increasing use of force. The unworkability of the colonial authority structure was being dramatically demonstrated in the rural areas. Meanwhile, at the centre of the colonial political system, Congress leaders and African politicians were challenging the colonial regime as well.

From mid-1956, there seems to have begun greater initiatives from Congress headquarters towards mass organization. It was at this time that the Congress leadership was becoming influenced by a group of more radical elements headed by two young University-educated Africans, Henry Masauko Chipembere and M.W. Kanyama Chiume, who had both returned home in 1954 after studying abroad. Both had soon come into contact with rural grievances through their occupations. Chipembere was in the service of the government as the District Assistant at Dedza and Chiume, after being refused permission to teach at Livingstonia, had taken to coffee farming and organizing co-operative societies in the northern region. In March 1956, they were among the five African supporters of the N.A.C. who were elected to the Legislative Council by the provincial councils,<sup>87</sup> and it is from this time, as full-time politicians, that they devoted their energies to arousing a more positive nationalism in Nyasaland. In late

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87. Colin Leys, "An Election in Nyasaland," Political Studies, 5 (1957), pp.258-280.

1956, they were joined in the Protectorate by Dunduzu Chisiza who was deported home to Karonga from Southern Rhodesia for his role in agitational politics in that country. Armed with zeal and determination and influenced by the successes of nationalism in West Africa, these three now sought to urge the essentially moderate Congress leadership to commit itself entirely to the idea of creating an independent African state based on majority rule. Freedom and not partnership, the young militants felt, should be the goal and such freedom should not be begged for but be wrested. For this it was necessary to harness popular forces and make the N.A.C. a mass nationalist movement.

Even though they were not office-bearers of the N.A.C., the young militants were gradually successful in eliciting a more positive response from the Congress executive. A national flag was created and the slogan of Kwaca (meaning dawn, i.e. freedom), which had been introduced during the early 1950s in the battle against federation, was now adopted by the N.A.C. to connote a more militant and nationalist stance. In view of the later nationalist symbols, it is interesting to note that no mention appears to have been made publicly during the period 1955-7 of the early African resistances which would link the past with the struggles of the present. No laudatory articles were published at this stage on Chilembwe, Domingo and Kamwana, and the memories of such men appear to have been revived only from late 1958 and



early 1959.<sup>88</sup> But even if the techniques and symbols of a mass nationalist movement were still to be fully developed, Congress was rapidly acquiring a popular base. This seems to have been due mainly to the activities of the rural bourgeoisie and the more radical elements of the central Congress leadership and African members of the Legislative Council. By April 1957, some 60,000 members held Congress cards<sup>89</sup> and estimates of income for that year totalled £13,550. Expansion of the movement was taking place as the masses led by local politicians came into contact with central Congress organization. Even in areas of no history of modern-type political activity, Congress was growing in membership. The leaders and people were joining, the nucleus of a mass and anti-colonial movement existed, and nationalism had begun in Nyasaland.

The main problem now was not so much the expansion of the movement but of holding it together at both the central and local levels. At Congress headquarters, differences were becoming strained between the young radicals and some other Congress leaders and supporters

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88. Although many Africans had certainly heard of Chilembwe Domingo and Kamwana, their knowledge of these men and of their resistances was probably not very detailed or precise. Congress leaders and the young militants were also not ignorant of these early resisters but probably did not possess sufficient information about them to revive their memories for political purposes. Is it possible, then, that the publication of Independent African by G. Shepperson and T. Price in 1958 provided the opportunity for the memories of these early men to be revived as national heroes? For a discussion of this subsequent revival, see George Shepperson, Myth and Reality in Malawi (Evanston, 1968), pp. 15-18.

89. N.A.C. Circular, 1,3 (April 1957).

who were less clearly committed to the new radical approach. The major question of division at this time was concerned with the position of the two Nyasaland members of the Federal Parliament. The young militants refused to compromise in any way with the federal political system and when their more moderate colleagues, W.M. Chirwa and C. Kumbikano, accepted seats in the federal legislature a serious split was provoked in the central Congress. To the radicals, even to take one's seat in such a white-dominated assembly implied a measure of acceptance of it; to the moderate elements participation was a way of bringing down federation. The radicals demanded that the federal members should resign; they resisted and were supported by the moderate elements in the N.A.C. In mid-1957, however, a memorandum prepared by Dr. Banda, who had since 1953 been resident in Ghana, appears to have "had a decisive effect" at the annual Congress conference and the federal members were expelled from the movement. But perhaps of greater importance was the fact that Banda's views coincided with the militant attitudes of the rural Congress leaders. As moderate resolutions seemed to have no influence with the authorities so discontent with the moderate leadership of the Congress executive had gradually developed. The 1957 annual conference, composed of central and local Congress leaders, also resolved, at the behest of the young militants, that Dr. Banda be invited to return to Nyasaland for the purpose of aiding the N.A.C. in its struggle for self-government, and it was clear that the movement was now fully committed to the



idea of independence and majority rule.<sup>90</sup>

During 1956 and 1957 many people in Nyasaland had been urging Dr. Banda to return home. Chipembere in particular was very conscious of the need for new leadership for he felt that he himself, Chiume and Chisiza were too young and inexperienced. Banda's absence abroad had enabled him to avoid the strains and factionalism of recent Congress politics and he alone possessed the qualifications necessary to bring coherence and success to the nationalist drive for independence.<sup>91</sup> And, indeed, new life, unity and confidence was provided to the African struggle by the return of Banda in July 1958 and his becoming President of the N.A.C. the following month. An even greater mass movement was now built up and Congress "transformed" "from an organization of about 83 disorganized branches to one with 200 disciplined branches in the country and several more outside."<sup>92</sup> In leadership, membership, organization and ideology, Congress, by 1959, had achieved the status of a full-scale nationalist movement.

Banda's vehement denunciations of federation, his vigorous attacks on the government's land and agricultural policies, and his vociferous cry for 'freedom,' combined with the forceful campaigning of his young militant

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90. Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Inquiry, Cmd. 814 (1959), pp.13-14.

91. ibid., pp.12-13.

92. W.K.M. Chiume, op. cit., p.35.

lieutenants, led to widespread disturbances, the declaration of a state of emergency in March 1959, the banning of the Congress and the arrest of its leaders.<sup>93</sup> But the day of British rule was virtually over.<sup>94</sup> Faced with the choice of maintaining control through the continued use of force (over fifty Africans were killed in disturbances) or of abdicating its authority, the imperial government decided on the latter alternative. The release of Dr. Banda in April 1960, and the presence of a permissive colonial authority amenable to radical political change, allowed the Congress (now the Malawi Congress Party) to substantiate constitutionally in the 1961 elections the claim it had put forth in rebellion.<sup>95</sup> Malawi was to become an African state and it was but a question of time before the country seceded from the Federation and reached independence.

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93. Cmd. 814, op. cit., passim.

94. See W.P. Kirkman, Unscrambling An Empire: A Critique of British Colonial Policy 1956-1966 (London, 1966), pp.39, 49-51, etc.,

95. Lucy Mair, The Nyasaland Elections of 1961 (London, 1962).



## CONCLUSION.

This thesis has been a study of colonial Malawi concerned with the development of African politics at the territorial level. There emerge from the above discussion some main points which may be stated in summary and conclusion.

In seeking to exercise administrative control over its African wards, the British administration sought to create points of contact with the subject peoples. The intermediaries who were found to establish and maintain contact between the colonial power and the African populace were the traditional authorities. But the destruction of the power of the more substantial pre-colonial chiefdoms consequent upon the imposition of British control, combined with the existing political fragmentation of much of the Protectorate, was not only to make 'indirect' rule through the chiefs difficult but also to render them unsuited for dealing with the new challenges of colonialism.

During the first two decades of British rule, the tribal system was breaking down and the authority and power of the chiefs declined. Although this was viewed as a good thing by the colonial authority, it realized that it could not operate effectively in the rural areas without the co-operation of the chiefs. From the early 1900s, therefore, the government attempted to ensure that the administrative duties of the officially-recognized chiefs were not made too onerous to destroy whatever

utility they still possessed for administrative purposes. At the same time, from 1912, the colonial government sought to build up again the prestige and influence of the chiefs to enable them to function effectively along new lines. Because their administrative duties were so light as scarcely to interfere with the preceding social pattern, so the traditional authorities also remained in close relationship with the local African tribesmen.

Meanwhile, the impact of western forces, some of which like western education had been operating since the late 1870s, were leading to a gradual cultural transformation among a number of African societies. Particularly in the northern region and the Shire Highlands area, a small minority of fairly well-educated and independent-minded Africans was emerging who believed themselves to be the successful pioneers of the new way of life and who looked forward to taking what they considered to be their rightful place within the new European-dominated society. In the eyes of the mission-educated elite, the traditional authorities had become civil servants and no longer the real representatives of their people. When the government therefore enacted the District Administration (Native) Ordinance of 1912 whereby the chiefs were confirmed as the agents of the colonial administration and also regarded officially as the authentic channels of communication between the people and the colonial authority, the educated elements were naturally alienated. Seeing themselves as more effective intermediaries between Africans and Europeans, the new elite began to assert its own



claims to represent the feelings and aspirations of the African people. They began forming Native Associations which were to become the main avenues for African political agitation during the inter-war years.

At the same time, some other educated Africans were pursuing political activity of a modern type through independent African churches. These church leaders protested against the abuses, frustrations and injustices that ordinary Africans were being made to suffer as a result of settler, missionary and colonial enterprises. One of these church movements, led by the Rev. John Chilembwe, attempted forcibly to drive out many of the hated white men from the country in 1915. But, as with the primary resistance to the introduction of colonial rule in the 1890s, the futility of rebellion was demonstrated once again. Africans were made abundantly aware that if they were to challenge white authority or even try to regain their independence, then different and essentially non-violent means were required.

During the inter-war period, the colonial government was in no position to commit any substantial resources to economic and social development in Nyasaland. There were consequently no important economic and social changes which tended to undercut the relationship between chief and people. The chiefs continued to be closely attached to the tribal ways of life and the mass of Africans remained psychologically within the small-scale, self-contained subsistence economy of tribal life. The chiefs also continued to remain the favoured agents of

the colonial authority and the government regarded them as the premier legitimizing force regarding African administration. Educated elements in the Native Associations saw the chiefs as being little more than the agents of district officers but they were themselves unable to gain admission to the official exercise of power in local affairs. Nor were the Native Associations very successful in changing the character and policies of the central government and were, further, essentially elitist bodies, never commanding a mass following. Nonetheless, their efforts and the organizational structures they established, helped to prepare the way for the more effective political undertakings of a later day. From 1930, the Associations were obliged to work in association with the chiefs if their views were to continue to receive attention from the government, and most of them now declined.

From the 1930s, however, the central government began to take greater action in all fields of economic and social development. Government controls began to proliferate particularly in the economic sphere and the mass of the people in the rural areas were gradually brought into individual contact with the machinery and personnel of the central government. The people now began to find that the solutions of traditional life were inapplicable and that the capabilities of chiefs were inadequate or irrelevant. At the same time, the educated elements had moved towards the formation of a nationwide political organization and had begun seeking direct



African representation on the Legislative Council and all other boards directly affecting the lives of the indigenous population. The lives of Africans were increasingly being affected by decisions made in such territorial bodies and it was important that African interests should be adequately represented on them. In the post-1945 period, the central government expanded the scope of its operations. By having to enforce a number of unpopular measures such as the regulations governing soil erosion, the chiefs were further discredited as the mere agents of the colonial government. The way was being opened for the new men to lend leadership to the masses who had become disaffected on a large scale by the government's agrarian and land policies. The imposition of the hated Central African Federation over the overwhelming opposition of the Africans in Nyasaland also led many to call into question the legitimacy of the colonial system. The Nyasaland African Congress, which had been founded in 1944, provided the framework for the coming together of the educated elite and the masses. A rural petty bourgeoisie organized branches of the Congress, recruited the masses into the movement and linked populist forces organizationally with the central organization of the N.A.C. From the mid-1950s, greater initiatives towards mass organization developed from Congress headquarters. Expansion of the political movement took place, nationalism began in Nyasaland and was soon to prove triumphant.

The transition from colonial rule to independence

characterized in Nyasaland by the absence of determined opposition to African nationalism from any of the sources which existed elsewhere in colonial Africa. The Protectorate was spared a struggle between the national movement and tribal sub-nationalisms. The fragmented, small-scale social structure prevalent throughout the country, combined with widespread rural poverty, prevented the formation of any coherent, self-sustaining movement possessing separatist political goals. Nor did the traditional authorities pose any serious threat to the political organizations of the new educated elite. As the central government expanded the scope of its operations, the chiefs began to fall into eclipse. Moreover, in the post-1945 era, the government gradually commenced undercutting the already limited power of the chiefs by transferring their executive functions to more democratic district councils as part of its programme to make the native authorities over into modern units of local government.

This study also demonstrates that while the N.A.C., which grew out of the inter-war Native Associations, was nurtured into existence by a very small group of educated Africans, a successful political movement only arose when the Congress came to command the support of the masses. Massive opposition in the rural areas brought local administration to a standstill in many areas and the unworkability of the colonial authority structure was demonstrated in the countryside rather than in the Legislative Council. Not only did the African villagers



challenge the colonial system but they transferred their support to the N.A.C. and provided its leaders with inspiration and confidence to strive for national independence. No African political movement could have obtained independence without the massive support of the rural masses. The British Government would not, in principle, have agreed to transfer power to a leadership group that was not broadly based.

But it must be emphasized that a sizeable portion of Congress' adherents were persons whose interests were such that their commitment to the long-term aims of the nationalist leadership - as distinct from opposition to colonial rule - were probably of the most nominal kind. For it seems that Congress was seen by many as a means of ridding themselves of some of the constraints of modern government. Even if Malawi is fortunate in not being greatly troubled by 'tribalism' the apparent homogeneity of interests within the African community, as against those of the colonial regime, will be exceedingly difficult to maintain in the post-colonial era.

## NOTE ON SOURCES

### 1. Malawi National Archives, Zomba, Malawi

The following files were examined:

- (a) Manuscripts on early African church leaders and movements to 1916.

S1/873/33, S1/1179/19, S1/1179"/19, S1/927/19, S1/1304/19, S1/3049/22, S2/29/22, S2/8/19, S2/8/26, S2/28/24, S2/22/34, S2/68"/19, S2/68/23, S10/1/1, S10/1/4, GOA 2/4/12-15, and J2/9/2.

- (b) Manuscripts on the inter-war Native Associations.

S1/1529/26, S1/1481/19, S1/3263/23, S1/2065/19, S1/1598/29, S1/210/20, S1/2104/19, S1/247/36, Nat.12/38, NC1/3/2-6, NC1/23/1, NC4/1/1, NS1/3/2-5, NSE1/2/3, NSP1/13/1, NN1/4/1, NNM1/13/1.

- (c) Manuscripts on the Nyasaland African Congress to 1950.

1a/1424 or Nat.34", 1a/1449 or Ass.4/13, and 27a/111.

- (d) Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province Series.

Correspondence: NS1                      Reports: NS2.

- (e) District Commissioners, Southern Province Series.

NSB1, NSB2, NSB5, NSD1, NSE1, NSE2, NSP1.

(f) A few files on Native Administration, Education, European political organizations and Closer Union were also seen.

(g) Issues of the African newspaper, Zo Ona, were examined for the years 1924-1928, and also the complete numbers of the African nationalist news-sheet, Kwaca, 1955-1956. 1

### 2. Livingstonia Mission Archives, Livingstonia, Malawi

The following documentation was examined:

- (a) Minutes of the Presbytery of North Livingstonia 1899 to 1944.  
(b) Livingstonia Mission Council Minute Books, Nos.1-2.

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1. The Malawi National Archives also holds irregular numbers of Zo Ona for the rest of its years of publication, 1925-1936.



3. Blantyre Mission Archives, Blantyre, Malawi.

- (a) Minutes of the British Central Africa Missionary Council of the Church of Scotland, 1890-1900.
- (b) Issues of the Blantyre Mission journal, Life and Work in British Central Africa, 1892-1900, were also seen. 2

4. University of Malawi Library, Chancellor College, Limbe, Malawi.

Photocopies of the following papers were examined:

- (a) H.H. Johnston papers.<sup>3</sup>
- (b) Seventh Day Baptist papers.<sup>4</sup>

Issues of the Livingstonia Mission news-sheet, The Aurora, 1897-1902, and the African nationalist journal, Tsopano, 1959-1961, were also consulted.

5. Public Record Office, London, England.

The following correspondence and documentation was examined:

- (a) Foreign Office Slave Trade Series (F.O.84), 1890-92.
- (b) Foreign Office British Central Africa Protectorate Series (F.O.2), 1893-1904.
- (c) Foreign Office Confidential Print (F.O.403), 1891-1904.
- (d) Colonial Office Nyasaland Protectorate Series (C.O.525), 1904-1939.
- (e) British Central Africa Gazette (C.O.541), 1894-1907 (published).
- (f) Nyasaland Protectorate Executive Council Minutes (C.O.626), 1907-1940.

6. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library, London, England.

The unpublished oral and manuscript evidence to the following Commissions was examined:

- (a) Hilton-Young (1929); (b) Bledisloe (1938); and (c) Abrahams (1946).

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2. The University of Edinburgh Library holds issues of Life and Work.... for the years 1892-1916.

3. The originals are to be found in the Rhodesian National Archives, Salisbury, Rhodesia.

4. The originals are to be found in the Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, Plainfield, New Jersey, U.S.A.

7. Rhodes House Library, Oxford, England.

This Library has a collection of a number of papers on Malawi the details of which may be obtained from Louis B. Frewer, Manuscript Collections of Africana in Rhodes House Library Oxford (1968). The following papers were found most useful for the present study:

- (a) R.H. Keppel-Compton papers on the deposition of Chief Gomani in 1953, Mss.Afr.s.864.
- (b) J.C. Abraham papers on Native Administration, Mss.Afr.s.938.
- (c) M.C. Hoole papers on Lilongwe Native Administration and Native-Controlled Missions, Mss.Afr.s.997.

8. British Museum Newspaper Library, Colindale, England.

The following newspapers were examined:

- (a) The Central African Times, 1899-1908.<sup>5</sup>
- (b) The Nyasaland Times, 1911-1939, 1947-1954.<sup>6</sup>

9. Church of Scotland Office, Edinburgh, Scotland.

The Overtoun Missionary Institution Boys' Register, Vols. 1-2 were examined.

10. University of Edinburgh Library, Scotland.

The following items were examined:

- (a) Papers and diaries of the Rev. A.C. MacAlpine, (Gen. 766).
- (b) The Central African Planter, 1895-6.<sup>7</sup>

11. National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Issues of the Livingstonia Mission newspaper, The Livingstonia News, were consulted for the years 1908-09. <sup>8</sup>

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5. Issues for the years 1898-9 are missing.

6. Issues for the years 1908-10, 1940-6 and 1954-6 are missing.

7. A volume of the Central African Planter for the rest of its period of publication, 1896-7, is to be found in Kew Gardens.

8. The National Library also holds issues from 1910 to 1918.



## 12. Private African Papers.

The following Malawians kindly made available to me some of their private papers:

- (a) The Rev. C.C. Chinula (Embangweni) (b) I.M. Jere (Ekwendeni) (c) J.C.W. Malifa (Blantyre) (d) The Rev. H.M. Phiri (Kasungu).

## 13. Interviews with Malawians (select list).

Interviews were conducted with the following persons between 1966-9:

W.P. Chigamba (Chiradzulu); Miriam J. Chilembwe (Chiradzulu); The Rev. C.C. Chinula (Embangweni); L.M. Bandawe (Blantyre); J.R.N. Chinyama (Ncheu); H.W.L. Chopi (Blantyre); C.B.B. Kancunjulu (Blantyre); I.M. Jere (Ekwendeni); Dr. D.S. Malekebu (Chiradzulu); J.C.W. Malifa (Blantyre); the late R.G. Nyirenda (Karonga); P.H. Moyo (Loudon); the late K.E. Mposa (Lirangwe); W.B. Mtambo (Chiradzulu); Chief Mwase (Kasungu); G.P. Ngolleka (Chileka); H. Ng'oma (Chintechi); Y. Masanjala (Chiradzulu); J.A. Phambala (Chilomoni); J.D. Phiri (London); the Rev. H.M. Phiri (Kasungu); J.F. Sangala (Blantyre); S.B. Somanje (Blantyre); K. Thipa (Zomba); R.I. Ziba (Loudon).

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(2) Nyasaland Government Publications

(a) British Central Africa Gazette, 1894-1907.

(b) Legislative Council Minutes and Legislative Council Debates, 1907-1958.

(c) Annual departmental reports, including: Agriculture, Education, and Native Affairs to 1958.



(d) Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to inquire into Various Matters and Questions concerned with the Native Rising within the Nyasaland Protectorate, 6819 (1916).

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